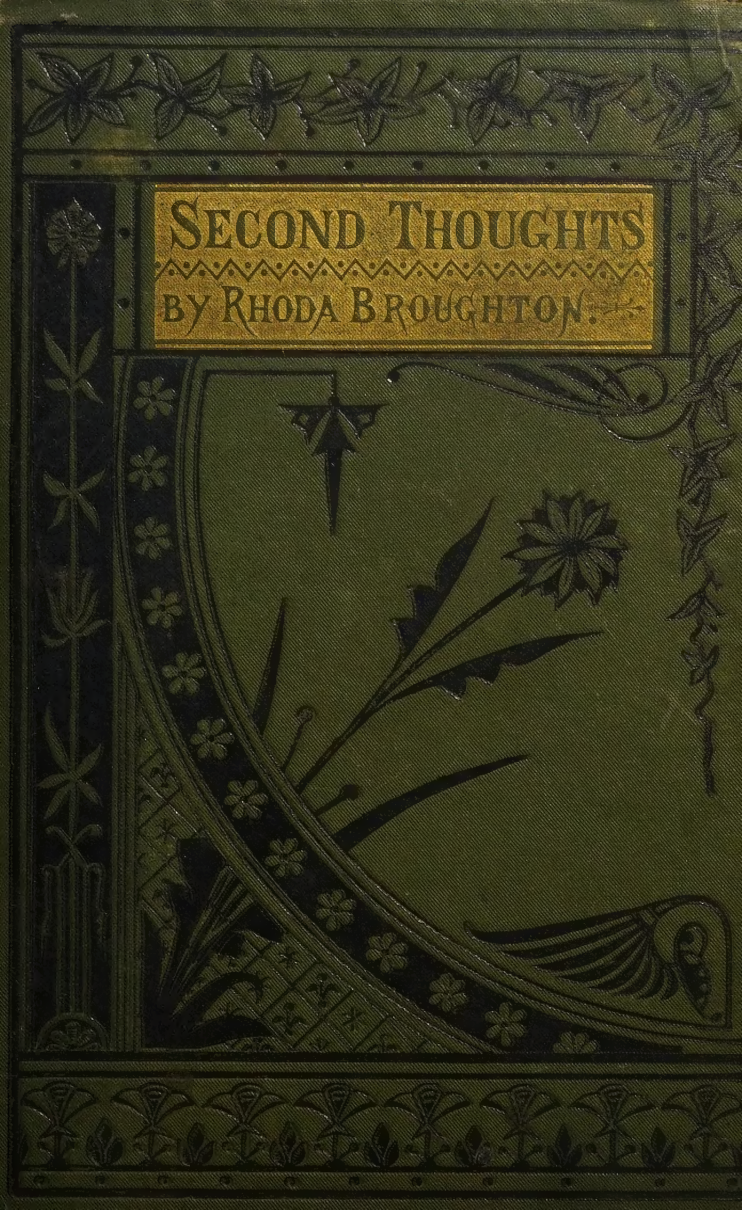
SECOND THOUGHTS

BY RHODA BROUGHTON.



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SECOND THOUGHTS.

A NOVEL.

BY

RHODA BROUGHTON,

AUTHOR OF

"GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART," "RED AS A ROSE IS SHE," ETC., ETC.

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SECOND THOUGHTS.

PART I.—FIRST THOUGHTS.

CHAPTER I.

THERE is no truer proverb than the one that tells us that "A watched pot never boils;" and yet, though they have all been watching, with their eyes upon the dial-plate, for the clock to strike midnight, it has struck at last. Instantly there is a rising, a rustling, a cheerful moving. Through the door of communication they pass—men, women, and children—from the sleepy, warm arm-chairs of the drawing-room into the chill semi-obscurity of the unfurnished, echoing gallery, which for the last twenty years has served for the romp-place, dance-place, wet-day-place, litter-place of the Marlowe family. Along the floor, upon the bare boards, each parted from the other by an interval of about a yard, stand twelve bedroom candles, which a stooping footman is in the act of lighting. Over these twelve consecutive candles the Squire; his two half grown daughters, Jane and Emilia; his ungrown son, little Dick; his full-grown niece, the mistress of his widowed household, Gillian Latimer, and all his guests in order due, are about to leap. Over twelve such candles the young Marlowes, ever since their little legs have put on the functions of such, have been yearly wont to jump as soon as the strike of clock, the ring of bell, the voice of Christmas-wait have told them that the moment

has come for discovering by this simplest form of divination the fortunes of the coming year.

"If you clear them all," cries Jane, in a high, bustling voice of excited explanation to an alien young man—Jane, whose own length of adolescent leg fits her for a nobler stride—"if you clear them *all*, you will be lucky all the year; if you put out any one, you will be unlucky in that month of the year to which it corresponds; if you put out the first, you will be unlucky in January, the second in February, and so on."

"And though," says Gillian, gayly, wrapping the while, with house-motherly precaution, a woolly shawl round the shoulders of Emilia, who has sneezed—"and though the event has never once fulfilled the prediction, our faith remains absolutely unshaken."

"And if you put them all out?" says the young man in a melancholy voice, eyeing the candle-flames with an absent, poet's eye.

He is a long, fragile young man, slender as any reed, and with legs even more spidery than Jane's, though, unlike hers, they give no idea less than that of jumping. If you were a good, motherly soul, with healthy red and white boys of your own, you would probably say: "Poor fellow! how thin he is! I should like to feed him up!" But you had better not let him hear the wish. What would a young gentleman, gnawed upon by the Welt Schmerz, a vowed votary of Our Lady of Pain, do with gross flesh and unæsthetic fiber? Far, far liever would he be lying in his narrow, poet grave, with the seamews screeching above him, and the bitter, bright seamother singing him an amorous salt lullaby, as in several of his minor poems he had already affectingly described himself.

"And if you put them all out?" says the young man.

"That is a catastrophe that we have never faced, even in fancy," replies Gillian, laughing.

"You could not do it if you tried," says Jane, loudly and bluntly.

And now the candles are all lit: twelve bright fire-needles, pointing upward from their lowly place. The rite is beginning. The Squire's brother, a celibate Anglican priest, or unmarried Protestant clergyman, as he would have been called twenty years ago, leads the way. Black-buttoned to his shorn chin, monastically petticoated to his heels, in twelve decorous leaps he attains the goal, and there awaits the plunging laity as they successively arrive. The first to reach his side is little Dick, light as thistledown, quick as light; then Emilia; then long-legged Jane; then a whole family of country neighbors: General Tarlton, Mrs. Tarlton, the two Misses Tarlton. Mrs. Tarlton is a stout lady, scant of breath and very much afraid of fire, so that it is a work of time and difficulty to kilt her sufficiently high for her fiery voyage. Even at the last moment one bit of unaccounted for drapery still droops, but her husband is the only person who perceives it, and he can not tell her of it, for the excellent reason that they are not on speaking terms to-night. Indeed, it is not often that they are. However, floundering and panting, she too attains. So does the General. So do the two girls, Sophia and Anne. In their soft, snowy frocks, and with their timid gait, they look like two harmless, fluttering doves. But even doves have their little differences of opinion, as any one who has kept a wedded pair of them in a wicker cage can safely avouch.

"Do you see Anne?" says the elder dove in wrathy aside to Gillian, apropos of her sister; "she is asking Brother Marlowe to button her glove, and you know that none of the Bagley Brothers like even shaking hands with a woman more than they can help; they have all taken the vows of poverty and celibacy, and—and—all that sort of thing. It is putting him in such a false position. Some one ought to speak to her."

Now it is the host's turn, and now the poet's. Coming after the broad, ruddy Squire, he looks like a faint exhalation that noiselessly rises in the wake of the set sun. With his long, fine hair waving behind him in the wind of his going,

and a sad, small smile on his parted lips, he floats over the candles like a lawny mist across the moon.

"Bravo, Chaloner!" cries the Squire, bringing his vigorous right hand heartily down on the young man's shoulder, as he lands beside him. "We are all in luck to-night. I congratulate you; you will have never an ache or pain from January 1st to December 31st."

"Oh, pray do not say so!" replies Chaloner, wincing a little, and shrinking away from the robust caress; "do not prophesy me anything so terrible; surely there is nothing so beautiful as the passionate pulsations of pain!"

"Is not there?" says the other dryly. "All right! there is no accounting for tastes; since you like it, I will wish you to have a colic every day of the week, and a fit of the gout on Sundays."

And now all have prosperously crossed—apparently it is very easy to be lucky—all save Gillian. Her year's fate alone still hangs in the balance. She alone still stands on the hither side of the prophetic lights. But, surely, for her there can be no danger. To that vigorous, light body, to those long, young limbs, a far greater obstacle would oppose itself in vain. On every previous year she has been over almost before you could say that she had set off; darting across with a swift, sure flight, like a swallow's. They all cry to her, "Come along!" and "Make haste!" but still she lingers. With her gown ungathered over one long arm, and her straight, light body bent a little forward, like Atalanta in act to run, she stands hesitating. It can not be that she is afraid of fire, for her dress is a heavy velvet one that would be more likely to extinguish flame than kindle it. Why, then, does she delay? She is off at last. But what has happened to lithe Gillian? At her first jump, swish! one candle is blown black out; a second; a third. Then, at last, with desperate hand upsnatching the weighty Genoa tail which has wrought her ruin, she springs lightly and happily over the remaining nine. But what does that avail?

Three baleful wicks stand smoking behind her. They all crowd round her, wondering, asking, pitying: the Squire, the girls, the boys, the Tarltons, even Brother Marlowe. Dick begins to cry; partly from the weary peevishness that the joy and glory of hearing the chimes at midnight mostly engender in a mind and body of six years; partly from unaffected woe. The poet alone expresses no surprise, offers no sympathy. He seems, indeed, quite unweeting of the little vulgar bustle around him. Sadly posed against a projection of the wall he stands, a Nocturne in black and white.

"Three running!" says Emilia, in an aghast semi-whisper, "three running!"

"You had better take *my* advice next time, Gill," cries Jane, in a voice of lugubrious superiority. "I warned you that you were not holding your gown nearly high enough!"

"January, February, March! my misfortunes will be the sooner over," says Gillian, lightly. She has picked up Dick, and is holding him against her breast; his afflicted face burrowing in the warm satin of her neck, while she pats his back like a puling infant's, slowly and rythmically, with consoling, practiced hand—"the sooner over! and you know that our candles have never in their lives spoken truth, so why should they begin now?"

But, all the same, she would rather not have blown them out.

CHAPTER II.

"An orphan? am I an orphan?" says Gillian, in a doubtful voice in answer to a question that has been addressed to her, laying down her pen. "What is an orphan? I am never quite clear; must one have lost everybody, or will one do? and how long does it last? Will one still be an orphan at seventy? Certainly, I have no mother."

It is the next morning. Outside, there is a white flurry of falling snow, and an angry wind that is lashing it with its icy whip. Inside, there is still and even warmth, and the perfume of fortunate flowers that have not fallen asleep on Earth's great cold mother-breast, to the numb lullaby of the snow-blast, like their sisters out of doors. Gillian is seated at a writing-table; but before her lies no cream-laid paper, no monogrammed envelopes speaking of the frivolities of a lady-like correspondence. No; up piled before her lies a good, honest heap of account-books. The butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker, each waiting in order due to tell her his simple tale. But now her pen was traveling conscientiously up the butcher's column, slowly journeying from rib to loin, from fillet to leg; and it is only with a sigh of meek desperation that this moment she has laid it down. For, in order to tussle with pounds, shillings and pence, especially pence; satisfactorily to add ninepence-halfpenny to elevenpence three farthings, and be sure that they come right, one must be alone. And Gillian is not alone. If it were one of the *habitués* of the house who thus intruded upon a solitude looked upon as sacred by the whole household every Monday morning, she would say to him plainly, "Go, you are in my way! I wish to be rid of you!"

But her acquaintance with the poet is of far too slight and formal a character to render such a friendly liberty possible. So she lays down her pen, and tries to keep out of the pleasant, civil face she turns toward him her sincere desire for his absence. He is far from suspecting her unholy wish, as he lies back in a low chair by the fire, leaning his Botticelli head —which he always feels a grudge against nature for not having provided with a permanent nimbus of dead gold—against the cushion, twanging a little zither, and singing.

"I too am an orphan," he says, softly. "Many of our sweetest and swiftest have been orphans. I would not have it otherwise."

"For *once* we agree!" cries Gillian, merrily, accenting the *once* as if this did not often occur. "But then, mine is an orphanhood *à part;* there is no one who would not like to be such an orphan as I am. All the liberty of an unprotected woman, and all the love of a protected one! What could one wish for better?"

She has closed the butcher's book, and is resting her folded arms resignedly upon its red back; while her clear eyes look without ill-humor at the destroyer of her morning.

"I am Uncle Henry's child," she goes on presently; "but," with a pretty headstrong smile, "I am his master, too! I think they all like me"—with a glance at him, appealing for confirmation of this statement, but he does not see it. "I could not bear to live with a houseful of people who did not like me; but, all the same," breaking into a laugh of content, "they tremble at my nod."

Chaloner does not laugh, too. He never does. Life never turns the comic side of her face toward him. He is of the same mind as—was it Chateaubriand who said, that, not only had he no keen sense of wit, but that it was positively disagreeable to him?

"Do you never wish for a larger life?" he says, severely: "more utterly human? more rhythmical? fuller?"

"*Never!*" says Gillian, stoutly. "If I had my choice, it should be, of the two, a little emptier. I am not afraid of work, as the servants say, but sometimes, what with the house, and the children, and the village, and the schools, and the Temperance-room, and the garden, I really do not know where to begin."

Her glance strays again unintentionally to her account-books, with a look which, to an instructed eye, says plainly that she would know well enough where to begin this morning were she only allowed the chance. His pale and misty glance follows the direction of hers.

"But surely," he says, with a sort of disdain, "there are

moments when you feel the inarticulate throbbings of a divine discontent."

"Indeed, there are not," replies Gillian, emphatically. "I am often discontented enough, notably when my uncle asks to the house three times as many people as there are beds and baths for, or when Dick is taken in the act of eating eleven green apples at a sitting; but my discontent is always perfectly articulate, and not at all divine."

"Perhaps," says Chaloner, with lenity, "you have never known a more beautiful life; perhaps"—with a hold-cheap glance through the snowy panes at the shrouded forms of the wintry trees, and the vague cold mounds and lumps that stand for shrubs and flower-beds—"perhaps you have always lived here," with a gently contemptuous accent.

"Ever since my aunt died," replies Gillian, her eyes idly fixed on the little ridge of crisp new snow that is momently growing larger on the window ledge outside. "That happened when I was fourteen: at fourteen I lengthened my gowns and threw away my lesson books, and took the reins into my hands, and"—with a smile of merriment yet resolution—"it will be some time before I drop them again."

"Until, I suppose," says Chaloner, a faint ray of malice lighting up his wan face, "that very muscular young lady"—with a slight shudder—"your cousin, Miss Jane, grows up and supersedes you."

"Nor then, either," cries Gillian, quickly—"none of them wish it; Jane as little as any. I have been as good as a mother to them these six years—they all say so," with a rather wistful look of appeal, which, like her former one, remains quite unanswered; "they would not have the heart to oust me! No," in a reassured tone, "I have reigned too long to abdicate; it would be the death of me!"

"I should have thought," says Chaloner, in a tone of cold disapproval, "that you would have been glad to cast away the gyves of these unlovely cares," waving his pale hand in the

direction of the butcher and the baker, "to have exchanged them for an existence with more of melody and culture: an existence"—sinking his voice to a subdued key, and looking pensively at the grate—"more saturated with sweetness and light."

Gillian shakes her head.

"I should not know what to do with it if I had it."

There is a silence. Beyond the window, snow, snow, snow! and wrestling with it, whirling in furious dance with it, piling it here, sweeping it there, is the sullen, strong wind-demon. What hardiest creature would venture across its own safe threshold to-day? Gillian is apparently entirely absorbed by the great duel outside, but, in reality, she is furtively observing her neighbor out of the corner of one eye, to see whether he looks at all unsettled or likely to move. But no! nothing can be more expressive of fixed and lasting rest than his pose.

"I had hoped," he says, presently, with an air of pensive disappointment, "that there was an affinity of loneliness between us—I had thought that we were both alone; but you—you have a father!"

"Yes, I have a father," replies the girl, shortly, in a tone that seems to ward off further questions from the theme of her paternity.

"And yet you live apart?" he says, interrogatively, and in a tone of more mundane curiosity than is usual with him, sitting upright in his chair, and looking directly at her, while his hand forgets to toy with his zither strings.

"Evidently," she answers, laughing brusquely, "seeing that I live here; and I cannot be in two places at once, like a bird. Come, let us go and see how the Christmas-tree is getting on."

So saying, she rises hastily, and leads the way out of the room and to the scene of her last night's disaster. The Christmas-tree is standing in its dark-green glory—a glory which is rapidly changing its character. It is exchanging its

own sober and monotonous decorations, its somber, weighty cones for a world of frivolous little flags, little pink candles, a gay variety of little fripperies. Many busy hands have been at work upon it since first the slow winter dawn stole in, and now it is groaning beneath a burden of unnatural products under which its grave boughs droop. Upon its solemn forest head a tinselly doll stands pirouetting on one leg. About the room lie hoards of stores in heaps; boxes overbrimming with penny-trumpets; little tin men on little horses, pop-guns, whips, bonbons—all the engines, in fact, that are to diffuse ear-piercing noises and widespread indigestions through a hundred happy homes to-morrow. For the moment, however, the tree is alone. Of all the busy hands that have been bedizening it, none are to be seen.

"Why, where are they?" cries Gillian, puzzled; "what has become of them?"

"You are looking too high for us," cries Jane's shrill, decided voice, from a little distance off apparently; "look lower, and you may probably find us."

Gillian turns, and, at the other end of the long and empty room, becomes aware of the whole strength of the company seated on the floor. Yes, even fat Mrs. Tarlton; though how she got down there, and how she means to get up thence again, are questions that can not but occur to any thinking mind.

"Oh, Mrs. Tarlton," says Gillian, in a shocked voice of hostess-concern, "there are no chairs! I am so sorry!—how *will* you get up again?"

"The same way in which I got down, my dear, I suppose," replies Mrs. Tarlton, chuckling. "Some one will give me a helping hand—will not some one give me a helping hand?" looking round with a good-humored smile.

But everybody is engaged in talk; nobody hears her except her husband, and he only scowls a little and looks away.

"Do not scold us, Gill," says the Squire, deprecatingly;

"we really have been working very hard; we are having ten minutes' relaxation."

And so they are. One glance suffices to explain the nature of their amusement. They are all spinning large humming-tops. Seven mature people and three immature ones, with intent faces and grave looks, are seated Turk-fashion on the cold parquet, emulously tying up each his top, and at a given signal friskly pulling the string.

"Come and help us, Gill," says the Squire, insinuatingly, feeling that, if he can lure his niece and sovereign into a participation in his frailties, she will be the less able to scold him; "come and sit by me."

"That I will," replies Gillian, joyously. "I love a top. Give me the biggest you can find."

"You too, Chaloner?" says the Squire, generously anxious to include everybody in the circle of his jollity. "No? Well, of course," with a laugh, "we are a pack of old geese, and you must promise not to tell of us."

Ten minutes have passed, and they are still spinning. The children, indeed, have grown tired of the sport, and have strayed back to the tree: tops to them are, or but lately have been, every-day occurrences; but it is long indeed since General Tarlton, Brother Marlowe, and the Squire have tasted the poignant joy of tightly tying up, smartly pulling the string, and emulously letting go into the arena their several combatants.

Not a word alien to the subject has been spoken for above a quarter of an hour. They have all risen from their squatting position into a kneeling one. Kneeling, you have a better purchase over your top. Brother Marlowe is watching with complacency through his spectacles the steady, slumberous motionlessness of his; General Tarlton is observing with chill misgiving a certain threatening wobbliness in the gait of his; and the Squire is crestfallenly eyeing the shipwreck of his hopes, as his *protégé* rolls away with drunken violence, noisily bumping

itself against the wainscot. They are all so preoccupied that not one of them has heard the door open, nor is aware, until he is well in their midst, that a footman, with the beginnings of a smothered smile at their occupation on his decent countenance, is presenting a man's visiting-card on a salver to Gillian. Even then it is not till General Tarlton's top has staggered away after the Squire's, and she has satisfied herself that even Brother Marlowe's is beginning to rock, that she can abstract her attention enough to stretch out a careless hand and say, in an indifferent voice:

"Who can it be? surely no caller to-day?" As her eyes fall on the inscribed name, no ray of intelligence or recognition lights up her face. "Dr. Burnet!" she repeats, in a puzzled voice, "I am not any the wiser."

"Let us look at it, Gill," says the Squire, taking the card in his turn, and also mystifically reading it. "Dr. Burnet! and who in the name of fortune is Dr. Burnet when he is at—"

He stops abruptly, becoming suddenly aware that the person upon whom they are so freely commenting is already in the room, well within eye-and-ear-shot of them all.

CHAPTER III.

"I am his highness's dog at Kew.
Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you?"

In a moment they have all struggled up to their feet—nobody remembers to give Mrs. Tarlton a helping hand—guiltily dropping their tops, and resuming their man and woman-hood. For a moment no one speaks. The intruder's eye is passing quickly and critically over the, to him, totally strange group. It slips rapidly over the elder people, rests a

moment on the Tarlton girls, then turns to Gillian, and abides with her.

"Am I speaking to Miss Latimer?" he says, looking point-blank at her, and speaking in a voice that sounds harsh, and not at all shy.

"That is my name!" she answers, surprised.

"Then I must ask the favor of five minutes' private conversation on important business with you at once," he says, in a tone that is nothing less than entreating or deprecatory.

So Gillian thinks.

"If it is on business, the right person to whom to address yourself is Mr. Marlowe, my uncle"—with a lofty introductory wave of the hand.

"Excuse me, my business is with *you*."

There is something in his voice so trenchantly matter-of-fact and resolved that Gillian finds herself involuntarily wavering and looking uncertainly across for help to the Squire; but, as in every emergency of life he has always been in the habit of having his mind made up for him by her, and not *vice versa*, he is in no position to help her. So she has to decide for herself.

"In that case will you be so good as to follow me?" she says, with stiff civility, beginning to sweep out of the room, with her flaxen head thrown well up, and leading the way into the adjoining drawing-room.

Arrived there, she stands and faces him; remains standing, indeed, for to sit down would be to admit that the interview may be long; to stand is to imply that it must be short. He shuts the door sharply, and, advancing toward her with the quick step of a man who is not in the habit of dawdling through life, comes to a stop exactly opposite to her, and immediately speaks.

"You do not in the least know, I suppose, who I am."

"I have not that honor," with a frostily regal inclination of the head.

"Of course not," he answers, impatiently, with a sharp flash

out of a pair of cross eyes; "but it is necessary, in order that you may understand the matter, that you should know that I am your father's medical attendant."

Again she bows, but this time the chilly pride of her look is mixed with and crossed by a strain of apprehension and fear.

"And he has sent me to summon you to him at once," he continues, planting each word like a thrust, and watching to see how far it goes home.

Her hand drops from the mantelpiece. She brings it and its white fellow together quickly in a clasp of dismay.

"To summon me to him!" she cries, hastily, frost and royalty together dying out of her voice, which is now only and entirely aghast; "impossible!"

"Impossible, is it?" he says, coldly; "and yet it does not seem a very unnatural wish in a man to have his only child beside his sick-bed."

At the disapprobation and rebuke of his tone, an angry crimson rushes to her face.

"I think," she says, haughtily, "that, unless a person is in full possession of the circumstances of a case, he should not permit himself to give an opinion about it."

If she expects that this thunderbolt will reduce her adversary to cinders, she is disappointed. He only says, dryly:

"And suppose that he is in possession of them?"

"In that case," she says, incisively, "I can not understand his consenting to become the bearer of such a message."

At the contempt of her tone his eyes flash again, and he seems about to speak hastily and angrily; but after an instant's tussle, getting the better of himself, he says, quietly:

"Possibly; but in this case it is the message, not the motives of the messenger, that is of importance to you."

If this set-down is less pungent than Gillian's own, it is also more effective, for it reduces her to momentary silence, which hers did not him. He approaches a little nearer the fire, a-

chilly distance from which he has been standing, and holds his hands to the blaze.

"Come," he says, in a more conciliatory tone, "there is no use in our bandying incivilities; it can matter but little to you what has dictated my conduct. I am only the implement in a more powerful hand. The fact remains, your father has sent for you, and, since you are a minor, you must go."

"Must I?" replies Gillian, stung by the peremptory nature of the last words, and reddening more deeply than before; "pardon me if I disagree with you. You must excuse my putting the question"—with elaborate, angry politeness—"but I must ask you what authorization you bring with you?"

Without verbal answer, he puts his hand into his breast-pocket, chooses from among a number of notes and memoranda one slip of paper, which he hands to her.

As her eyes fall upon it, they see written, in a hand not familiar, indeed, to her, for she has seen it but seldom, yet known enough to be at once recognized—a shaky, straggly old man's hand—these few words:

"Do as the bearer bids you.

"Your father,

"THOMAS LATIMER."

As her eyes lift themselves slowly from this pregnant billet, they meet his, and encounter them with a deep and defiant hostility. Gillian is not fond of obeying any one, but to obey implicilty this mannerless, middle-class, insolent stranger!—she, before whom not only a large and numerous household, but a thriving, thickly peopled village, and well-attended schools, not to speak of a class of reclaimed drunkards, have for six years bowed down and done obeisance! Her blood, even on this freezing January day, boils at the thought. Her face changes swiftly from poppy-color to milk, and back from milk to poppy-color.

"Your errand is ended now, I presume?" she says, in a low voice, with trembling lips, and so steps hastily toward the door.

"Stay!" he cries, unceremoniously, putting himself between her and it. "The evening mail leaves Carnforth at 8.5; will you—but, indeed, you must be ready to go by it."

She stops, for he has rendered exit difficult.

"Thank you," she says, icily, with the slightest possible bend of her head, "but I need not trouble you about my arrangements: they are *my* affair."

"Of course they are mine too," he says, roughly, losing his temper, galled by her tone, and by the insolence of her gray eyes, "seeing that we must travel together."

"Travel together!" she repeats, angrily, turning the orbs which have hitherto disdained to look full at him, bright with hurt pride, upon his also angry face, "pardon me, if I see no such necessity."

He makes a movement of unmeasured irritation, but then hastily pulls himself together again, and says, with tolerable civility of tone:

"Why will not you be reasonable? There is no doubt that, whether it is agreeable or disagreeable to you, you will have to obey the orders of the one person on earth who has best right to command you. Would not it be simpler—would not it show more common sense to do it with a good grace than a bad one?"

She is silent, too utterly wrathful to be able to bring out a single word; but the stubborn pride of her face shows him how little effect his words have had.

"If," he continues, severely, with a tinge of strong sarcasm in his slow and emphasized words, "if neither affection nor duty weighs with you, perhaps you will at least listen to the voice of interest. Let me assure you that, if you persist in refusing, you will injure yourself and your own future far more than you will any one else. Your father is ill, and—"

"But is he ill?" cries Gillian, the string of her tongue sud-

denly loosed, and a torrent of excited words pouring from her lips, while cheeks and chin and pearl-fair throat grow all one red rose flame, "that is the question. Perhaps, since you are so fully in possession of the circumstances of the case, you are aware that twice—three times in the course of my life he has sent for me in the same way, suddenly, without a moment's preparation. Once I was called up in the middle of the night, and when I got to him I found that it had been a mere whim, a caprice to show his power over me. He was as well as you or I—"

She stops, out of breath.

"This time he is not as well as you or I," replied Burnet, quietly; "you need not be afraid!"

Another silence—a more hostile one, if that be possible, than the former on Gillian's side; a coldly observant and expectant one on his. When it has lasted some two or three minutes—a small piece out of time's long sum if you measure it by the clock, but irksomely great for two perfectly unoccupied dumb persons—he breaks it.

"The mail leaves Carnforth at 8.5," he says, in a matter-of-fact business tone. "I am told that the distance from here is seven miles; and, as the roads are heavy, we had better not be later than seven in setting off."

Then he bows, no longer impeding, but, on the contrary, aiding her exit, for he opens the door wide for her; and she, without another look at him, hurries out, forgetting even to hold up the head which sinks in completest discomfiture on her breast, worsted, dismasted, routed! If the village, the schools, and the reclaimed drunkards could see her now, would they know her?

CHAPTER IV.

Several hours have gone by, and the little drab day has already dropped into the maw of the huge and hungry night. It was most unlovely while it lived, and nobody regrets it now that it is dead. Probably to-morrow will bring a little brother quite as ugly; but for the moment we may forget it, now that the curtains are heavily down-dropped, and the lamps steadily burning under gay shades. Lights in the rooms, lights in the passages, lights everywhere, save in the play-room, where the Christmas-tree stands with all his peg-tops and trumpets, with his crowning doll still poised on one leg, in the dark, forgotten and eclipsed. Yes; eclipsed, and thrust into the shade by a newer topic of interest—by Gillian's going; for Gillian is going. Her high looks and fiery words—her wreathed neck and flaming cheeks—have been among the utterly null and waste things of this wasteful world.

Nobody seems one penny the worse for them; and the brougham is ordered to be at the door at seven o'clock. It is not seven yet, however. There is still a spare half-hour. A sensible girl would be spending it in solid eating—one can eat a very great deal in half an hour—in up-building herself to defy the raw night and the railway buns; but Gillian is doing nothing of the kind. She is sitting with her uncle in his study, giving him her last mournful commands and prohibitions, which he is receiving with his usual complete teachableness. Her head is resting on his shoulder, and tears of mortification and sorrow are welling into her eyes and flowing over their brims. Sometimes she wipes them away; sometimes he does; sometimes they remain unwiped.

"I suppose it is the best thing to do," says the Squire, in a dolorous small voice; "I suppose we could not do otherwise?" A moment later, with a rather more cheerful intonation: "I think he seems an honest fellow, Gill."

"*Do* you?" says Gillian, with expressive accentuation. "I am sorry to differ from you, dear; but I think, as far as one can judge from appearances, that he has quite one of the worst countenances I ever beheld."

"Has he?" replies the Squire, meekly. "I am no great physiognomist; I dare say you are right."

A pause.

"I can not think what you will do without me," says Gillian, with unconscious conceit, sadly gazing at the glowing coals, as pictures of the total disorganization of family, house, and village, consequent on her departure, march gloomily through her mind.

"I am sure I can not think," echoes the poor Squire, humbly.

"I fear you will all be at sixes and sevens by the time I come back."

"I am sure we shall."

"Try to keep things together, dear," in a gentle hortatory voice—"try to keep a tight hand on the reins."

"I will try, Gill," not very confidently.

"I am a little afraid of Jane," pursues Gillian, thoughtfully; "she is a good girl, but rather inclined to be self-willed and masterful"—as if these were the last qualities with which she herself could have any sympathy. "Will you try to keep her a little in check?"

"If you wish, Gill," with less confidence.

Another pause.

"Sophia Tarlton has promised to take my drunkards," continues the girl, thoughtfully. "I have left all my Temperance tracts in the order in which I wish her to read them; I am anxious that she should make no mistake. Will you remind her?"

"Yes, Gill."

Again they are silent, but so is not the wind. Plainly they can hear it raving and tearing and hustling outside.

Gillain shudders.

"What have I done to deserve a journey of a hundred and fifty miles on such a night, and in such company?" she groans with an accent of angry contempt.

"Perhaps, after all, he may not be such bad company," says the Squire, consolingly; "perhaps—who knows?—he may turn out quite a pleasant fellow!"

"I shall certainly not give him the chance," returns Gillian, with dignity; "his proximity is forced upon me, but I may, at least, be spared his conversation; nothing will induce me to open my lips to him."

"What! not between Carnforth and Euston?" raising his gray eyebrows with an air of slight incredulity.

"Undoubtedly not!"

Panoplied in this splendid resolution, Miss Latimer, now that the last half-hour is up and the brougham at the snowy door, prepares to go off into the inky night with the escort, who is as yet ignorant of her sociable intentions toward him.

Totally neglected by everybody—for is not everybody fully occupied in kissing and crying over Gillian?—he is inoffensively employed in the background in putting on his coat and drawing on a very ugly pair of woolen gloves.

"Good-by, dear!" says Gillian, solemnly, and in a rather choked voice, though still with a tone of authority and admonition in it as she throws two furry arms round her uncle's neck. "Remember all I have told you, and let me find everything just as I left it when I come back."

"If you are not back by Sunday, Gill, I will take your class," cries Jane, in a confident, managing voice. "I will do the mothers' meeting and the Temperance-room—do not be afraid!"

Emilia says nothing, being dumbly whimpering; and Dick has begun to bellow so monstrously loud that he has to be carried off, tearfully bawling that it is all the fault of those

nasty candles, and easing his mind by hammering the face of the unoffending footman who is bearing him away.

The adieux are ended now, and Gillian turns toward the snowy night and the open brougham door, but at a sudden thought once more looks round. What has become of her maid? the maid whose protecting presence is to insure her against all danger of the proximity of her obnoxious companion, for the brougham is a single one, and of course holds only two.

"Where is Griffiths? Tell her that I am waiting."

"If you please, ma'am, she has gone on in a fly with the luggage."

Gone on in a fly with the luggage.

At hearing these words Gillian's heart sinks with a sick presage of misfortune. But desperate ills ask desperate remedies. Presence of mind and resolution of character have ere now saved people out of worse dilemmas than this; but, in order to effect her own rescue, she must even thus early break through her vow of silence. She turns to her fellow traveler, and says, with an air of chill decision:

"You, no doubt, wish to smoke? There is no reason why we need take a footman; you will therefore be able to go on the box."

The snow is driving into and the wind cutting her eyes as she speaks, which no doubt renders her vision imperfect, else were she not assured that it is impossible—she would say that there was a twinkle of angry mirth in his eyes, as he answers, bowing formally:

"Thank you, I do not smoke. As I have already a cold, I will, with your permission, come inside."

She can not suggest that he shall run behind the carriage like a boy, or underneath it like a dog, which are the only other alternatives; and as they are all calling to her, and bidding her make haste out of the storm, there is nothing for it but that she should put her indignant foot on the already whitened step and spring in. He follows her without an in-

stant's delay, and the horses, fidgety and stung by the cold, set off at once with a plunge. Even her last look at her beloved ones is spoiled by having to be thrown across her neighbor. And yet it is not very likely that he should think that any of its valedictory sweetness was meant for him, or to try to appropriate it. They are off on their six hours' *tête-à-tête;* the same foot-warmer communicating its peaceable warmth to both alike; the same wolf-skin rug covering both their knees, and yet with as honest an intention of being as disagreeable to each other as circumstances will allow as ever filled two human breasts. To make a good beginning, Gillian has ostentatiously contracted herself into as small a compass as she can, and shrunk up into her corner, sweeping away her fur cloak as far as may be from his neighborhood; but it is to be feared that owing to the complete darkness this action is somewhat thrown away, and that till the last hour of his life he never knows, though he may suspect, how solicitous she was on that first night of their acquaintance to shun his slightest contact. They had reached the lodge. Gillian lets down the glass, and cries out a friendly good-by in the darkness to the lodge-keeper, who, lantern in hand and shawl over head, runs out to open the gate. They are in the road now—the broad main-road. It is already several inches deep in snow; but the horses are strong, and gallantly breast the long, steep hills, so there is no cause for apprehension. So Gillian thinks; and, resolving to abstract herself as much as possible from her disagreeable *entourage*, she leans back in her corner, thrusting her hands still further into her muff, and raising her shoulders so as to sink her neck more deeply into her fur tippet, like a bird's head into its feathers. Her mind travels first back into the past, confidently, for she knows the road is pleasant; into her own full busy life, a life of guiding, ordering, managing. She sighs gently, and repeats to herself the apprehension she had already expressed to her uncle:

"What *will* they do without me?"

Then her mood of self-complacent regret melts and changes. It is the future which she is now facing; the future, through whose haze looms, the figure—little known, yet how much dreaded—of her father; the father, old, very old—old enough to be her grandfather—with whom she has never lived, in separation from whom her mother passed the last years of her short and blameless life; who, for as long as Gillian can remember, has not been on speaking terms with her uncle; concerning whose mode of life she knows absolutely nothing, save what she has gathered from a few dark hints picked up haphazard here and there; hints which imply that it were better she should not know. She is roused from her meditations by the sound of a movement of some kind on the part of her companion. It is too dark to see what he is about. Is he going to sneeze? In her present mood even this would seem an impertinence. I do not think that even a pick purse motion of his hand in the direction of her own pocket would greatly surprise her. She is not long left in doubt. The indeterminate sound of stirring and seeking on his part are soon exchanged for the distinct scrape and scratch of a lighting match; and now a little point of flame has sprung into being, and is dimly seen to be protected from death by a woolen gloved hand. Then there comes another little sound, as of a lantern being opened, and the next moment the match's unsteady light is communicated to the candle in a small carriage-lamp, and is burning clear and steady. Then a voice comes.

"Do you object to the light?" he asks, curtly, in a tone of almost as much contained hostility as her own; "because, if not, I should be glad to read."

For a moment she demurs, unwilling to accede to any proposal made by him, however harmless, or in itself even desirable; loath to give her consent to anything that is likely to promote his comfort.

"It can not affect you much," he goes on, impatiently, while she feels, without seeing, that through the obscurity he is

glowering irritatedly at her—"It will not hinder your sleeping if you wish. We have neither of us any desire to talk; and to get an undisturbed hour's reading is a great object to me." He stops, awaiting her answer.

She must give one of some kind or other.

"Pray do as you please," she says, ungraciously; "it is a matter of complete indifference to me."

But it is not. However, he requires no further permission, but at once fastens the lamp by its little hook into the cushion behind him, and takes out a book. Gillian tries to resume her meditations, and to pick them up again at the point where they had been broken off; tries to summon up again the image of her father, and to remarshal in order her faint reminiscences of him, and her resolutions to do him good, whether he likes it or not. But it is no use. It is true that the candle is no annoyance to her personally, since her head and eyes are in deep shade. The modest light falls only on the open book, on the wolf-skin rug, on Burnet's woolen fingers as he turns the page; but the idea of it teases her. There is also a new sense of offense and brooding injury in her breast. His "neither of us has any desire to talk" rankles in her mind. If it is undoubtedly true, yet it is not his part to say so. Though, of course, nothing would induce *her* to converse, yet he ought to be not only willing but anxious to do so, did she give him an opening. By and by that curiosity which has beset us all in our day, which countless times has prompted us, in boat and train and public conveyance, to find out what our unknown companion is reading, and so peep, as through a loop-hole, into his mind, begins to worry her. Even from the comparatively distant fastness of her corner, she can make out that the broad and clearly printed page outspread on her neighbor's knees belongs to the "Nineteenth Century;" but what the special article is that engages his attention is more than she can decipher. Only it has a light and winsom-

look, large islands of verse apparently swimming in little seas of prose.

After resisting the temptation for some time, she at last edges a little nearer, quite noiselessly, and without any danger of detection, as she flatters herself. Finding that nothing can be easier, she begins, almost before she is aware, to read over her enemy's shoulder with him. It is apparently a paper on the Greek anthology, in which little jewels of Greek fancy, Greek love, Greek sorrow, deftly done into English verse of different metres, sparkle and blaze on threads of prose. Some minutes pass. She has read a page and a half, and has forgotten the snowstorm, her father, Burnet, and herself. Her eyes are eagerly travelling over this paragraph :

"The next is Elizabethan, too, if I may classify my poets, but full of epithets almost impossible to English.

"I cry you, love, at earliest break of day ;
But now, even now, his wings the wanderer spread
And passed away,
Leaving his empty bed.

"Ho ! ye that meet the boy—for such is he—
Full of sweet tears and wit, a fickle sprite,
Laughing and free,
With wings and quiver bright !

"Yet know I not on whom to father love,
For earth denies the wanton child his name,
And air above,
And the broad sea the same.

"With each and all he lives at feud. Beware,
Lest while I speak he cast
A dainty snare
Over your hearts at last.

"But, see—"

At this point, and while she is still six lines from the bottom, a woolen finger and thumb smartly turn over the page and whip the rest of the poem away from her sight.

Involuntarily she utters a little inarticulate cry, and half stretches out her hand in prohibition. The sound and the action together recall her to herself. In a moment she has shrunk up again into her corner, shamed, remorseful, red, and hoping that her lapse from dignity and self-respect has been perceived by no one but herself. But in this she is apparently mistaken.

"Did you speak?" he says, lifting his eyes.

"No—o!" she stammers; "I—I—only coughed."

"I beg your pardon," he rejoins, dryly; "I thought you spoke."

For the rest of the distance before Carnforth is reached, Gillian sits as still as a mouse, gnawed by angry self-reproach, execrating the Greek anthology, and forgetting even to think of how much they are missing her at home.

CHAPTER V.

CARNFORTH station is very empty when they arrive there. The wind, with his long, stinging lash, seems to have driven every one off the platform, except the porters and a few ulstered, comfortered men, stamping up and down, waiting for the night mail.

In the waiting-room Gillian finds half a dozen chilly, ruffled women, who grudgingly make way for her to draw in her chair also, and put her boots on the fender.

The train is late. It seems to Gillian that she spends a long time staring at the big lumps of coal and the plentiful ashes in the dirty grate, before the sounds of distant whistle and near bell tell her that it is coming. Then all the other women pick up their bags and boxes and hurry away, either alone or beckoned off by a summoning husband. Her own escort is the last to appear, but at length he, too, puts in his head.

"Will you come, please?"

She follows him in silence along the platform; but, having arrived at the door of an empty carriage, into which he motions her, speaks:

"Will you tell my maid, please? I always have her in the same carriage with me."

"I am afraid that you will have to do without her to-night," he answers, not offering to move. "I have just ascertained that neither she nor your luggage has yet arrived."

"Not arrived!" cries Gillian, in a voice of consternation, facing him in the windy gas-light; "and you suppose that I am going to set off without her! Quite impossible! Of course I shall wait!"

"That is much more impossible," rejoins Burnet, firmly; "there is no other train till 7.5 to morrow morning. I have left word that she is to follow you as soon as possible. I think I must ask you to get in, please."

He looks so resolved, and the porters are beginning to shut the carriage doors so quickly, and her own mind is in such a world of doubt and disgust, that there is nothing for it but to obey. Put to the rout for the third time within six hours, she stumbles up the high step, blinded with rage. Again they are off; embarked now upon the second and larger half of their unnatural *tête-à-tête*. There is but one improvement upon the first part in it, and that is that they may at least be further away from each other. There need be now no contact of hostile sleeves, no enforced partnership in one rug.

Gillian's window is down, and through it, as they begin to move more quickly, the cutting night-wind comes in full blast. Without speaking, Burnet crosses over from his own seat and begins to draw up the sash. She has certainly every wish that it should be pulled up, and, had he left it alone, would undoubtedly have pulled it up herself; but now, since he is doing her this little service without asking her leave, a spirit of fool-

ish and irrational contradiction prompts her to put her hand upon it, and say, stiffly:

"Excuse me, I prefer it down."

"*Down!*" he repeats, in an accent of excessive astonishment, looking hard at her with unconcealed incredulity in his eyes—"*to-night!* Are you serious?"

"Certainly I am," she replies, shortly, nettled at the suggestion of its being possible that she should indulge in pleasantry with him, and doubly exasperated by the consciousness that she is making a fool of herself; "I like air."

"Indeed," he says, with a dry smile and a shrug, "you will certainly have plenty of it;" and so returns to his corner and puts on another coat.

Gillian remains the victor; but in this, as in many other cases, how much worse is victory than defeat! Before five minutes are over, what would she not have given to be beaten in the conflict! Was there ever a wind that carried so much ice and so many knives with it as that which—strong as a furnace-blast, cold as death—is now cruelly blowing full against her, and seems to cut her face into ribbons? She holds up her muff to try and protect herself a little, but the knife wind gets over and under and through and on both sides of it—runs in terrible play up her sleeves, laughs at her furs, and derides her wraps. Is there any one drop of blood in her veins that is not frozen? She bears it with senseless Spartanhood for as long as endurance is possible. To her it appears several hours: in reality, it is probably about ten minutes. Then, looking furtively toward her enemy, and perceiving that he has every appearance of being asleep, with head sunk on chest and hat tilted over his eyes, she begins cautiously to try and pull up the sash. But her numbed hands have lost most of their power, and the window is stiff; tug and tug as she may, she can not get it to stir. She desists at last, and in despair changes her seat—tries the middle place; but the wind, now carrying sleet also with it, reaches her there too. She sits with

her back to the engine, but all is of no avail. The whole carriage is turned into an icehouse. Once again she glances toward her neighbor. Apparently he is still sleeping like a baby. She tries again at the window, standing up this time so as to bring more force to bear upon it. But her struggles are absolutely useless.

She leaves off at last, and sinks desperately into her original corner—the most exposed in the whole carriage, while into her smarting eyes tears of utter physical wretchedness, of mortification, and yet of anger too, still creep saltly. Who but one destitute of all delicate and gentlemanlike feeling could sleep through such a crisis? She is sitting with her muff again lifted to and pressed against her face, when a sudden voice beside her startles her.

"Do you still like air? or have you had enough?"

She looks up hastily, her pride and self-respect too much drowned and swallowed up in bodily misery for her to remember or heed that rapidly freezing tears are on her cheeks, and that he can distinctly see them. Mutely, for she feels as if her voice were frozen too, she motions toward the window, but apparently this time he will not proceed without the most distinct instructions from her.

"Am I to understand that you wish it shut?" he asks, formally, without a tinge of apparent compassion, but not without a distinct suspicion of stifled entertainment in his voice.

"Shut! shut!" she gasps, half sobbing, while her teeth chatter so much as to render her scarcely intelligible.

In a moment, forced by a good, strong jerk, the shielding pane interposes its slight but potent barrier between her and the dread forces of the night.

Burnet returns to his seat, and sneezes several times.

She has at least the comfort of thinking that she has made his cold distinctly worse. It is, perhaps, well that she should have this one morose consolation, for certainly it is her only one. Her body has been so thoroughly chilled that through

the whole long journey she is quite unable to raise its temperature again to anything like an agreeable or wholesome level. She is too cold to sleep, too cold to read, to cold to think connectedly of anything but her own coldness. It seems to her that there will never be an end to this chill rushing through the raven night; this flashing through deserted stations; this flickering of the faint lamp on the cushions and on the muffled form of the silent man at the other end of the carriage. His absolute motionlessness gets upon her nerves at last. In point of fact, he is sleeping the honest sleep of a tired man, who has not been in bed for three nights. But to her it seems, in her overwrought state, that to be so absolutely still he must be dead. She is quite relieved when he wakes, sneezes again, and alters his posture a little, even though his eyes in opening meet hers, nervously peering at and fixed upon him. Cheered by no friendly companionship, lightened by no chat, shortened by no slumber, the dreary night walks on. It is one o'clock in the morning when at length they draw up along the platform at Euston. Having no luggage, they get off easily and quickly, and are soon jogging and bumping, in all the ineffable discomfort of a cold yet stuffy four wheeler, along the streets and thoroughfares, still wakeful and astir.

From Euston to Belgravia is, as we all know, a considerable distance. Progress over the frozen pavement and the slippery asphalt with a jaded old horse is necessarily slow. By the time they reach —— Square, Gillian is one degree number, two degrees wearier, three degrees crosser than when she left the railway station. The door is opened by an affable but sleepy charwoman, at sight of whom Burnet utters an exclamation of surprise, and says, half to himself:

"All gone to bed, I suppose!"

Then he quickly leads the way through a cold hall and up a flight of carpetless stone stairs, then up a second flight of equally carpetless wooden ones, till they come to a standstill on a carpetless landing, outside a bedroom door.

"Will you wait here?" he asks, in a half whisper, as he puts out his knuckles to knock. She nods sullenly, and he, having been admitted by a woman in the dress of a nurse, enters. He leaves the door ajar, so she is able to get a faint view of a room indistinctly lit by fire and night-light, and of a large bed.

"So it is you, is it?" she hears a small, old voice say peevishly; "it is a comfort to think that you have not hurried yourself."

"I came as quickly as I could," replies the other, quietly.

"And have you brought my Cordelia with you?" rejoins the old voice, with a little acrid laugh.

"Miss Latimer is here; will you see her to-night—now?"

"God bless my soul, no!"—with a great access of ill-humor—"where is the hurry? It is a pleasure that will keep."

Burnet says "Hush!" and looks apprehensively toward the door, to which, indeed, he now returns, and addresses his late traveling companion: "He does not feel equal to the exertion to night," he says, speaking with some hurry and confusion. "He prefers—"

"Thank you," replies Gillian, caustically; "you need not trouble yourself to repeat—unfortunately for me I am not deaf—it is a pleasure that will keep."

Burnet looks a little foolish, and goes back to his patient. Before long, however, he rejoins her on the landing, where she is still standing: being, indeed, so unfamiliar with her father's house as not to know where else to go. Both his sharp eyes and his quick voice express sincere concern and vexation.

"I am so sorry," he begins, almost humbly; "I really do not know how to tell you; but it seems that, in my absence, he has sent off all the servants—dismissed them at a moment's notice. It was one of his freaks; he did it once before. There is not a soul left in the house but the charwoman who let us in."

As Gillian remains stupidly silent, he adds, in a tone of extreme irritation:

"He says he could not help it; that the thought that a pack of hungry rascals were eating their heads off at his expense while he was kept on slops, was more than he could bear! And you have not even your maid with you"—compassionately—"what *are* we to do?"

"Pray do not concern yourself!" replies the girl, recovering her speech, and irrationally offended at his employment of the pronoun "we." "When I set off this afternoon I braced myself to meet any and every hardship and indignity."

At the pseudo-patience and real ill humor of her face and tone, his compassion—perhaps easily put to flight—takes to itself wings.

"Hardships!" he repeats, a little contemptuously; "you must have very little practical acquaintance with the word to apply it in such a context. And as to indignities"—flashing an exasperated look at her in the gas-light—"pshaw! who is thinking of offering you any?"

A moment later, with a more temperate, yet still impatient, accent of appeal:

"If you would but be reasonable, things would be so much easier!"

Total silence is all the answer this request obtains.

"Well," he says, shrugging, and with a rather compunctious glance at her tired figure, as she leans dispirited, yet wrathful, against the banisters, with lips that quiver, though her eyes are still mutinous and haughty—"well, one thing is certain, you can't stand here all night; will you follow me, please?"

So speaking, he leads the way toward another door on the same landing, and opens it with the remark, "This is the room that I told them to get ready for you."

He has certainly no intention of offending her by the observation, and yet at every word he sinks deeper into the mire of her ill esteem. "*I told them to get ready for you!*"

What business had he to tell them? Are they, or rather were they, his servants? Is this his house? Well, at all events, whether he had a right to give them or not, his orders have been most indifferently obeyed. As the door opens, a chill air meets them, as of a room not lately occupied. No warm glow of old-established fire and glimmer of tall wax candles melt and brighten the girl's frozen weariness. The fire is, indeed, evidently but just lighted, although around it, arranged in semi-circle over the backs of chairs, hang mattresses and sheets to air. For such a fire it would be a task too heavy to air a pocket-handkerchief. Kneeling before it on the rug, is the charwoman, working hard away at a pair of bellows. As they enter, she stops for a moment to look at them, and at once the weakling flame, no longer urged into spurious gayety by the bellows' blast, flags and subsides again into blackness.

At this encouraging sight Burnet utters an exclamation of strong disgust, and begins to rush into a hasty speech, in which, however, he stops short. Perhaps it strikes him that the reason why his commands have been so poorly executed is, that there has been no one to execute them. Without another word, he seizes the bellows from the inefficient hand that grasps them, and, dropping on his knees, begins to grind away with such a potent and steady fury that before many minutes are over the sulky flame races willy-nilly straight and strong up the chimney.

Gillian remains silently watching him, her sole attempt at conversation being a shivering, eager acceptance of the charwoman's proposal to go and make her a cup of tea. After a while Burnet rises from his knees, and, glancing at the now vigorous tongues of flame that are curling round and licking the coals and spiring brightly upward, with something of a creator's satisfaction, advances toward her, bellows in hand.

"That is better, is not it?" he says, cheerfully. She bends her head a very little, in frigid assent. "Bad is the best, I am

afraid," he says, looking round rather ruefully, and then, seeking her eye as if he would be glad to find there some civil recognition, however slight, of his honest endeavors for her comfort.

"Thank you," she says, sourly, for to-night she could not get her good temper back, even if she wished, and she does not wish it; "it is not very much worse than I expected."

At her words the look of friendly appeal dies out of his eyes. He turns abruptly on his heel, and, dropping the bellows noisily with a movement as ill humored as one of her own, goes to the door, and, without any further words or parting salutation of any kind, good or bad, walks out, and leaves her standing among the mattresses, like Marius among the ruins of Carthage.

CHAPTER VI.

THE night is past—Gillian's first night under her father's roof, and quite the most disagreeable night she has ever spent, excepting, perhaps, two or three in early childhood dedicated to croup and measles, and whose woes have grown dim by distance—a night without night-clothes, a dressing and undressing without any toilet apparatus, an absolute brushlessness, comblessness—worst of all, tooth-brushlessness. To one in such perfect health as she, it has generally seemed enough to constitute a bad night if she has heard the clock strike once. To-night there is hardly an hour of whose coming and going she is not wakefully aware. A deep distrust of the dryness of her sheets first drives sleep away. Then follows a panic recollection of all the anecdotes she has heard of people who have been paralyzed for life by sleeping in such. Then a frenzied rising and tearing of them off the bed; then a miserable rolling and tossing, irritated by the unwonted contact of the safe

but tickling blankets. She is glad when day comes, though nothing can be shabbier or more hang-dog than its mode of entry. She gropes her way to the windows, and, unbarring shutters and drawing back curtains, looks out into the square at the besmirched snow that overlies bush and flower-bed in the square garden—already, though it fell but yesterday, speckled with blacks into an ugly pepper-and-saltiness—how unlike the clear candescence of country snow! Out of it a few chrysanthemum wrecks are lifting themselves, pinched and tall. She raises her eyes, and they wander among the multiform chimney-pots, the hooded ones veering compliantly round with the wind, the straight ones standing steady against the grim sky.

An early milk-cart, with milk cans rattling in it, is jogging by. She thinks, with disgusted comparison, of her morning outlook at home; of the stretch of dazzling snow-sweep under her window, touched by nothing impurer than the fine, light footsteps of the pretty birds; of the wonderful snow patterns, fantastically lovely, drawn by winter impartially on the green-clothed firs and the bare, brown forest-trees.

By and by, having made such mutilated toilet as she can—and it is not easy to dress hair with no other comb than your fingers, and no other brush than the palm of your hand—and having breakfasted with sketchy discomfort on such tea and tough toast as the charwoman—at present her only Providence—sees fit to put before her, she issues from her room, and sets out on a voyage of exploration over the house. It is really of exploration, for she has never been in it before, her father having occupied another on her last visit to him; and though nothing very original or new is likely to reward her curiosity in the dull uniformity of a London house, yet it is as well to learn the landmarks of the country to which freakful fate has brought her.

She opens one door, then another, then another, with the persistency of Bluebeard's wife. Always the same sight meets

her—carpet rolled up, curtains folded, holland-swaddled chairs, some on their own legs, some with their legs in the air; bagged chandeliers, muffled pictures in hall and landing, statues and busts, dimly outlined through their shrouds, meet and startle her.

There grows upon her quite a nightmare feeling at last. How long is she to live alone among this nation of bags—the only unbagged thing among them! Involuntarily she glances down nervously at herself. Perhaps, without knowing it, she is in a bag too.

By and by she strays into the library, and, lifting a corner of the great sheet which hangs, white and ghostly, over the tall book-cases, peeps at the titles of the books beneath. Below, the heavy quartos that no one reads—weighty classics, ponderous fathers, slumbering year-long undisturbed, encyclopædias, annual registers; above, rows upon rows of tempting octavos.

She has just—standing on tiptoe, for it is almost beyond her reach—pulled out one of the latter, and begun shortly to dip into it, when the noise of the opening door and the apparition of a face and eyes looking inquiringly around it disturb her. It is the trim, staid hospital nurse, of whom she caught a glimpse, last night, giving admittance to Burnet.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," she says, civilly, "but Mr. Latimer is asking for you."

"Is he?" cries Gillian, in a rather awed voice, hastily replacing her volume exactly level with its fellows, and emerging from under the sheet; "I will come."

As she follows her guide up the naked, echoing stairs, she tries, and pretty successfully, to still the qualms of her trepidating heart by stout thoughts of the judicious gentleness and respectful tact with which she will seize every opening to put in a profitable word in the coming conversation.

"I have always had great influence over the people with

whom I lived," she says to herself, throwing a complacent glance over memory's shoulder at the docile Squire.

They have reached her father's door, and are on the point of opening it, when a sudden doubt strikes Gillian—a doubt that sends a sharpness to her tone and a flash into her eyes.

"Is he alone?" she says, suspiciously; "are you sure that he is alone?"

"Quite sure, ma'am," replies the nurse, and they enter.

The curtains are only half drawn, the blinds but half pulled up. The bed is in a recess, so that it is not till Gillian is close by the bedside that she sees with any distinctness its occupant. As he does not even then give her any verbal greeting, or stretch out his hand to her, she stoops, and, thinking that it is expected of her, kisses him timidly and rather shrinkingly. But she is soon disabused as to this having been the invalid's desire.

"God bless my soul, child!" he cries crossly, rubbing his face with a very fine cambric pocket-handkerchief; "how cold your cheek is! I think, my dear, *ne vous en déplaise*, that we will defer the repetition of that ceremony *sine die*."

At this fatherly speech, the red gallops to her fresh cheeks. They make the one bit of bright color in the gray room. This is not the way in which her kisses have been wont to be received. She is too choked by hurt pride and wounded feeling to be able to answer in words, but she nods silently. With her long arms hanging by her sides, and her eyelashes drooped on her flaming cheeks, she remains standing by the bedside, nervously afraid of making any new step in this quite unknown country, after the very ill success of her last, and hotly conscious that her every physical defect is being gauged and measured by a pair of keenly critical old eyes.

"I must apologize for not having been able to receive you last night," resumes the old voice presently, in a tone of frosty, conventional civility. "I hope," with a tinge of acid amusement in his thin tones, "that you had a pleasant journey."

"Pleasant!" she cries, tragically, quickly raising her lids, while from under them flashes a sudden, angry, gray arrow, "that is so likely!" Then hastily breaking off and speaking more quietly, though still in a tone of profound indignation, "I would have come of my own accord, without being fetched like a naughty child."

"Would you?" he replies indifferently, as if the subject rather bored him; "but it was best to be on the safe side, was it not? at least so Burnet said—it was his idea."

"His idea!" she echoes, irefully; "and, pray, what business had he to have an idea at all upon the subject?"

"You had better ask him," replies the invalid, fretfully, turning his face about on the pillow. "If you want to make a scene with any one about it, pray let it be with him." A moment later, as she keeps a wrathful silence, "As for me," he says, with a little air of dried and withered gallantry, "of course I am always charmed to receive a lady; but, *entre nous*, my dear, from the little I remembered of the former visits that you were good enough to pay me, I was afraid we should not amuse each other very much, and so I told him."

As she still remains speechless, swallowing down in great gulps her mortification, he turns his face, which in his ill humor he has averted, so as again to command a view of her humiliated countenance.

"Do you think," he says, after attentively surveying it awhile, in a voice of almost appeal, "do you think, my dear, that it is within the bounds of possibility that you could amuse me?"

"I think it is most unlikely," she answers, in a low and unsteady voice. After a moment, with an honest effort to conquer her resentment, and speak naturally and amiably, "But though I certainly can not be amusing"—smiling nervously—"perhaps I may be useful. I have always been accustomed to be useful. May I try?"

"Good Lord, no!" in a tone of the most extreme irritability; "let me beg of you, my dear, not to make the attempt.

I know nothing in the world I should hate so much. How many more useful people"—with a satirical accent—"do you suppose I want about me? Have not I Burnett, and Mrs. Smith, and as many more as I choose to pay for? Did you think"—with a sour little laugh—"that I sent for you to make my bed and boil my arrowroot? If you did, pray undeceive yourself at once."

She does not answer; for, indeed, to such a speech what answer is there to be made? She only stands hopelessly still, while her color keeps shifting from frightened white to mortified red, and back again.

"If you could make me laugh," he continues, with a glance of ill-humored impatience at the humbled girl beside him—"I am aware, my love; that there is nothing in the world more improbable; but if you *could*—if you could think of some racy scandal or *fin mot* to tell me—Gad!" (breaking off suddenly, and rolling his head angrily about on the fine pillow) "the worst of having lived so long is, that one has heard over and over again every good thing that has ever been said!"

While he is speaking, a weak ray of young sunshine has stolen through the half-closed curtains, and fallen softly on his sick and peevish face; and the boiling indignation at the insults piled upon her powers of entertainment which has hitherto been Gillian's most prominent feeling—Gillian, whose jests have ever been held in the little admiring circle at home to be of so rare and pungent a quality—gives suddenly way to an immense and womanly compassion.

"I am afraid I do not know any stories that would be likely to amuse you," she answers gently, running over in her head her simple stock; "but, if you liked, I might read to you. Would you mind—may I—will you let me—read you something, a—a little—grave—a—a—a little serious?"

Never in her life has she spoken a sentence that was so difficult to utter as this one, which she now haltingly brings forth; but a sense of its being her duty and a faint re-

mainder of the old self confident notion of her own influence uphold her. But she looks nervously down as she speaks, unable to meet the tired cynicism of those eyes.

For a moment there is silence; such a long moment, indeed, that she lifts her glance to see how her proposition has been received. The invalid has raised himself a little in bed, and is sitting, resting his sickly hued face on his shadowy hand.

"Thank you, my dear," he says, mockingly, and bowing; "you are a very good girl, and I am exceedingly proud of possessing such a daughter; but, if it will not hurt your feelings, I must tell you that I have the bad taste to be not very fond of parsons in petticoats. I am told—and I have no reason for doubting it—that there is a very active and efficient body of clergy at St. Chad's in this very square; if I require their services, you may depend upon my sending for them. Can you read French?"

"A little," in a choked voice.

"We will at least try," he rejoins, in a voice of some alacrity; "since you are so good as to offer your services, I will accept them, though perhaps"—with a dry little laugh—"not exactly in the way you meant."

As he speaks, he points to an adjacent table littered with foreign reviews, newspapers, and yellow-backed novels and plays; and she, rising and going to it, under his direction, chooses a French journal, and, returning, sits down, also under his direction, exactly opposite him, where he can nicely observe every shade of expression, every nervous blush and mortified contraction that passes over her face, and begins to read.

Gillian's French is of about the same caliber as that of any other average English girl, who, having been but little out of her own country, has had small opportunities for acquiring conversational facility or mastering idiomatic difficulties. It is honest and conscientious as far as it goes, but that is not very far.

The article chosen for her is the *feuilleton* of a newspaper and is stuffed with the dramatic, artistic, and literary *argot* of the day; crammed with allusions to the club-life, theatre-life, to the whole social body, in fact, of Parisian existence, and absolutely unintelligible to any one not intimately versed in that society. She reads on carefully and painstakingly, if in a somewhat parrotlike and monotonous voice, as must be the case with any one reading what is only very partially comprehended, through a column and a half.

Then, as her auditor has given no sign whatever, beyond an occasional slight chuckle here and there, the cause of which has been invariably quite dark to her, she stops, and, looking up, asks in a rather frightened voice whether he likes it.

"Immensely!" he says, smiling ironically; "your accent is unique, my dear, and it is evidently all Greek to you; but, with the exception of these two trifling drawbacks, nothing can be better."

She had rather, though not very confidently, expected praise—in her past life her every action has been so wont to call forth encomium, and at his sneering words and tone she lays the paper angrily down, and reddening furiously, says, in a tone of concentrated indignation and offence:

"I was always considered to have a very good accent at home."

"Were you, indeed?" lifting his eyebrows, and with the same chill, cynic smile.

"Fraulein Schwartz, my cousin's governess, always said that she should have taken me for a Frenchwoman, if she had not known."

"Did she, indeed? Poor Fraulein Schwartz!"

It is some moments before Gillian can recover her voice enough to ask in a tolerably good-humored tone whether she shall go on.

"Not to-day, I think," he answers, with a little, ill-natured

laugh. "A very little of such a treat goes a long way; we must keep some for to-morrow."

By a great effort of self-mastery she had taken up afresh and reopened the volume.

At his words she lays it down again, with a sigh of wrathful relief.

"I am inconsolable at having to dismiss a lady," he continues, with an ironical, icy politeness in his small voice and in his sick yet sarcastic eyes; "but, if you will excuse an invalid's plain speaking, I think, my child, that I should be very glad if you would leave me."

As he speaks, he points with one long, wasted hand to the door; and she, hastily rising, passes out, with gray eyes brimming and blonde head down hung; passes out, angered, humbled, diminished past compare. Whither has that influence, that power of impressing those around her, for which she has always told herself that she was so remarkable, gone?

CHAPTER VII.

Two days pass; the frost goes, and the dirty snow melts in the square garden, and shows again the shabby brown grass that it has been hiding. The iron-hard streets have grown as soft as boundless slush can make them. The ice-swords have disappeared out of the air, and London is all mud and mildness. Gillian's maid and luggage, who turn out to have lost their way and been overset in a snow-drift, have arrived; the luggage intact, the maid sobbing. Not being of the stuff of which martyrs are made, she has, at the sight of the empty house, the charwoman, the brown hollands, tearfully and promptly given warning; and, having expressed her hysterical willingness to forfeit her month's wages sooner than spend

another night in such a place, has contemptuously been allowed to depart on the instant, and her young mistress remains alone. As absolutely alone, indeed, as if she were actually the sole denizen and care-taker of the silent, swaddled house. Two whole days have passed, and not once again has she been summoned to her father's bedside. A week ago she would have thought it impossible that an invalid so nearly related to her should not wish for her ministrations; for her who had so cleverly and patiently nursed the Squire and the children through broken collar-bones, and gout, and measles. She would have felt sure that there must be some mistake. But her one interview has made any sharp hit to her self-love seem not only possible but abundantly probable.

Sometimes relief at her immunity is the predominant emotion in her mind, but oftener lacerated vanity and sore feeling.

Not once has she been outside the doors; not even for a cheerless constitutional in the square. She has been too much afraid of being out of reach should the delayed call for her come.

She spends the dragging hours chiefly in the forlorn, dismantled library; protected from the cold by a large seal-skin coat; diving under the pendant, ghostly sheet that veils the bookcases for fifty different books; emerging from under it to dip into, and read, and turn over and taste them by the yellow, London, winter light.

At last, on the third day, toward mid-afternoon, as she is standing poised high up on the library ladder, one hand grasping it to steady herself, the other holding an open volume, and, for a moment, oblivious of her woes, the same staid head and decent body that had once before appeared there are again seen in the aperture of the doorway.

"Is he asking for me?" cries Gillian, in an excited voice, looking round and down from her elevation, with an animated, if rather frightened face; "does he want me?"

The nurse looked a little uncertain.

"I suppose so, ma'am; at least they told me to fetch you.'

"*They!*" echoes Gillian, with emphasis, fixing an austere glance on the countenance of her interlocutor; "and who are *they?*"

"Dr. Burnet is here, ma'am," replies the woman, innocently; "it was he that gave me the message."

Gillian has come down from her ladder, and unfastened her coat. At these words she begins to rehook it, and sets her foot on the lowest ladder-rung, preparatory to swarming up again.

"I shall not come," she says, proudly, "and so you may tell the person who sent you!"

Mrs. Smith looks a little surprised; but as, from the nature of her trade, she is in a chronic state of being behind the scenes, of seeing the wheels and pulleys of the social machine at work, nothing is able to astonish her much.

"I think, ma'am," she says, with civil protest, "that, if you will excuse my taking the liberty of saying so, it is a pity you should not come. Dr. Burnet is the only person who has the least influence over the gentleman. I am sure I do not know how I should have got on at all but for him."

For a moment the girl stands irresolute; then common sense who, if you give it time enough, mostly makes its small, judicious voice heard, resumes its sway.

"Very well," she replies, slowly; and so follows, without any remonstrance.

They enter the sick-room quite noiselessly, having no teasingly rustling gowns to announce their presence—so noiselessly, indeed, that neither the invalid nor another man, who is standing with his back to them, hear their entry. Mr. Latimer is speaking.

"It is deuced hard," he is saying, in a thin, complaining voice, "that I, who have always held wit *diablerie* as the first qualities in women, should have been cursed all my life long

with a series of meek, mawkish inanities in my own womankind."

"I do not think her worst enemy could describe Miss Latimer as 'meek,'" replies Burnet, with a rather grim mirth in his tone.

The words are hardly out of his mouth before some slight movement betrays the vicinity of her of whom he speaks, and he turns and faces her full. It is physically impossible for her not to have heard him. Even were it not so, the sharp contempt and red scorn of her look would sufficiently tell him that she had overheard his observation.

"Listeners never hear any good of themselves, you know," says the invalid, with a little malign laugh. "You may be thankful, my dear, that it was nothing worse. For my part, if I were you I should take it as a compliment."

"I take it as it was meant," she answers, incisively, not deigning another look at her foe, but, on the contrary, turning her back upon him, and stepping loftily to the bedside.

"Are you coming to give me another French lesson, my child?" says the old man, lifting his sunk and fading eyes with a twinkle of pseudo good humor in them to the ireful gravity of hers. "It is a thousand pities, Burnet, that you are such a busy man; here is an opportunity that may never occur to you again. I must tell you that my daughter is an accomplished French scholar. She has been frequently mistaken for a Frenchwoman—Fraulein Schwarz says so; is it not so—eh, Gillian?"

She flushes violently, up to where her bright hair first encroaches on her brow, and down to where the stiff, dead-white linen collar clasps her tender, live-white throat. For a moment she does not speak; then, with an effort of self-mastery and resolution really heroic in one so impatient and proud as she, she says, in a pretty steady, if low voice, and trying to smile:

"Fraulein Schwarz and I were evidently mistaken, but we are neither of us so foolish as not to wish to improve, if you will show us how."

He looks disappointed.

"Pshaw!" he says, crossly, turning his face to the wall, "I am not so conceited as to suppose that I can teach a woman anything. Gad!" with a chuckle, "they have taught me one or two things in their day!"

As he goes on chuckling for some time to himself, and takes no further notice of her, she involuntarily looks away, sighing, and most unintentionally meets the eyes of Burnet fixed upon her with an expression which, were he anybody but he, she would greet and answer as one of honest compassion and sympathy. Since it is he, however, she only looks haughtily away. But, apparently, he is not daunted by a gray eye nor slain by a fierce look. In a moment he is standing at her side, by the bed.

"You have not been out of doors to-day?" he says interrogatively, scanning, not unkindly, her cheeks, already a little paled from their country bloom by vexation, discomfort, and lack of fresh air.

"No."

"Nor yesterday?"

"No."

"Hitherto you have been used to an open-air life, have not you?"

"Yes."

She drops the niggard monosyllable grudgingly. What business has he to be catechising her about that good and blessed life of hers, from which he, and he alone, has reft her?

"It is fine to-day," he says, looking toward the window, through which a glimpse of cheerful outside shining can be caught. "For the moment the winter is gone. There is a touch of spring in the air."

She makes no answer.

"I think," he says, almost gently, "that, if you will allow me to advise you, I should recommend your taking a turn."

"Thank you, I have no wish to go out."

"You are not used to confinement; it may hurt your health."

"I am not afraid."

"You may be well spared for half an hour."

He says it in all good faith, but she imagines that she detects a lurking sarcasm. She that in two and a half days has never been sent for, or made any use of, may be spared for half an hour! It sounds indeed like irony.

"I have no doubt of that," she answers, resentfully—"or for half a year either, for the matter of that."

"What are you two whispering about?" says the invalid, fractiously; "are not you aware that the A B C of nursing is not to whisper and fidget in a sick room? If you want to chatter, be so good as to go out on the landing."

"We are not chattering," replies Burnet, calmly, but in a firmer, severer tone than is often employed toward his patient; "there is not the smallest applicability in the word; I was simply advising Miss Latimer to go out a little into the air."

"Do as as he bids you, child," says the old man, sharply. Then, as she remains mutinously, motionlessly silent, he turns his heavy head and the tired ill humor of his eyes suspiciously toward her, to see the cause of her non-obedience to his order. "He is quite right," he says, looking at her with a cold, critical scrutiny; "you grow as yellow as a dandelion. For Heaven's sake, do not play tricks with your complexion! What is a woman without a complexion worth? about as much as a last year's almanac." Still she does not budge an inch. "Do not I speak plain?" cries her father, rising his fragile form up in the bed, and speaking with intense irritation. "God bless my soul! do not let me have to say it again; do as Burnet bids you. Go!"

So stringent a command even she dare no longer disobey. She crawls with snail-like slowness to the door—a protest in every step: in the carriage of her tossed head; in every line of

her indignant back, as she turns it to them in walking away. Having reached the door, she turns, and, protected from her father's gaze by the position of the bed—an old-fashioned four poster—hurls back at Burnet one pregnant look of bottomless obstinacy and defiance. Had she shaken her fist in his face it would have been a less lady-like, but not more distinct, promise of future vengeance. Safely arrived outside, she stands a moment on the landing, and then, deliberately descending the stairs again, reenters the library, redons her sealskin, remounts the ladder, and reopens the book that ten minutes ago she had hastily left. But from the page has somehow gone its Lethean power. She can not again lose herself and her vexations in it. She is too thoroughly jarred and out of tune. After vainly trying for a quarter of an hour to tie her attention to one sentence, and ever seeing between her and it nothing but a couple of unescapable faces, she gives up the idle effort; and, slowly leaving her high perch, walks listlessly to the window, and looks discontentedly out. It is a back room, and she has a cheering immediate view of mews; helpers washing a landau that has just come in; a coachman mounting the box of a brougham that is just going out. Beyond, chimneys, chimneys, chimneys! sordid backs of ugly houses; small and sooty back-yards. She leans her elbows on the sill, and sighs heavily five or six times. Then, finding that her sighs have dimmed the pane, and troubled her view of the groom who is dashing bucketsful of cold water at the landau's wheels, she takes out her pocket-handkerchief and begins dismally to rub it clean again. As she does this very slowly, for she knows of no occupation that is likely to succeed it, and it must therefore be a little husbanded, she is still at it when the door opens sharply, and some one—Burnet—comes briskly in,

"What, no fire?" he cries, quickly, glancing from her to the empty grate and back again. "How is this?"

"I am not cold," she answers stiffly, though the violet tinge

that had superseded and spoiled the young roses in her cheeks and the chilly splendor of the end of her nose give her the lie.

"You have not been out, then?" he says, in a tone of some surprise.

"No; I never had the least intention of going," she answers calmly.

"And why not? It would have done you good."

"I felt no inclination," she answers, haughtily, "and I did not recognize the authority that bade me."

"Authority?" he repeats, hotly. "Pshaw! what an extraordinary wry twist you must have in your mind to make you take everything by the wrong end!"

She remains disdainfully mute.

"What could it matter to me," he goes on, with impatient, angry quickness, "except for your own good, whether you went or staid? Which of us two will it harm most if you injure your health and your digestion by confinement and want of exercise?"

No answer. A reluctant inner voice is indeed telling her that what he says is just and sensible, but she would rather die than listen to it.

"What an impossible person you must be to live with!" he says, in a rather low voice, and more as an ejaculation to himself than as an observation to her, looking at her the while steadily and almost compassionately.

"No one has ever said so before!" she cries, shocked. "What right"—turning upon him a flaming face and eyes like two swords—"have you, a perfect stranger, to bring such an accusation against me?"

"I speak of you as I have found you," he answers, very quietly; "invariably uncivil—completely irrational."

For a moment she is silenced, gasping for breath: then she breaks out.

"Why did you bring me here?" she cries. "What good do I

do you? What end do I serve? What could have been your motive? You must have had a motive; what was it?"

She fires off these questions like a flight of little darts at him, each one accompanied by a look, sharpened and pointed to reach the innermost fold of the subtlest heart. He looks back at her reflectively.

"I had a motive," he answers; "but you are, for reasons best known to yourself, so profoundly prejudiced against me that you would not believe it if I told you."

"At least," she cries, impetuously, "I must beg of you to give me the chance!"

"I think not," he answers, slowly; "no—o—o!" (coldly studying her excited face); "it would be a waste of breath: probably some day you will learn it."

"Am I of any use or pleasure to any living soul here?" she cries, trenchantly, still thrusting her bitter questions home. "Do I nurse him? do I wait upon him? do I give the least aid or relief to Mrs. Smith?"

He does not at first answer. Then, as her imperious asking eyes insist on wrenching a reply, he gives one.

"Undoubtedly, not the least!"

"Would not any one else serve as well as a butt for him, which is the only office I fill?" she goes on, with increased heat.

"Quite as well."

"Then why will you not let me go home?" she cries, urgently, tears gathering in her voice; "go back to the people who find it possible to live with me," with an offended accent; "not only so, but find it difficult to get on without me."

He lifts his eyebrows a very little.

"Are you indeed so indispensable? Not many of us dare call ourselves that."

"But I am!" she answers, hotly; "I am the mainspring of that household; whatever is done there is done by me. I can

not bear to think," with a break in her voice, "of how badly they are missing me."

"Console yourself," he answers, a little ironically; "probably not half so badly as you imagine."

Then, seeing that she is going to burst forth into indignant rejoinder, he goes on:

"I mean no insult to you personally; but, believe me, no one is ever much missed. Whenever anyone falls out of the ranks, there are always ten to take his place."

"That is poor consolation," she answers, brusquely.

"It grates on one's self esteem," he replies, calmly; "but, all the same, it is so; a hundred times in my professional experience I have seen it." As he speaks he walks toward the door. "Well," he says, turning as he reaches it, "it is of course optional with you to go or stay. You know what my advice is, and I equally know how absolutely without weight with you that advice is. Good evening."

CHAPTER VIII.

GILLIAN does not go; she stays. A fortnight has passed. Use is everything, and it seems to her now as if for the larger half of her life she had been waited on by a charwoman, and had had her food fetched from a cook-shop. For the invalid has obstinately declined to *monter* his establishment again even partially.

"You were all so determined that I was going to die at once," he says, sarcastically, "that I thought I would save my successor a great deal of trouble. I have done him a good turn, and I can assure you that I have not the least notion of undoing it again."

So the chairs, tables, chandeliers, and book-cases still abide

in their ghostly shrouds; the naked chairs still echo under every falling foot; and Gillian moves, the only live-colored thing, among them. At somebody's orders, indeed—she forbears from inquiring whose—a small upstairs sitting-room has been made habitable for her. There a fire burns; thither unexplained pot-plants come, and there the girl sits alone most of the short yet long January days, waiting to be sent for to the sick-room; waiting, waiting!

Sometimes for a whole day, or even two, the summons she is expecting never comes, and she sits, drearily stitching, absently reading, mopingly thinking, from breakfast to bedtime. Sometimes, on the other hand, she is kept prisoner for interminable hours by the side of the sick-bed, hearing little godless tales that shock and do not amuse her; nervously reading aloud unknown books in unfamiliar tongues, until voice fails and eyes ache; trying, seldom judiciously, to put in words in season, and being invariably baffled and routed in the attempt, and finally being dismissed with ironical thanks and sarcastic compliments, and returning to her solitude with the dispirited conviction that all her wear and tear of mind, body, and temper have been absolutely of no use at all. One ray of light has, indeed, cheered her darkness, in the shape of the letters she has received from home. If anything could reinstate her in her self-esteem, it would be they. Plaintive records of little domestic disasters, all dating from and owing their origin to her departure from her uncle. Warm hearted school-girl gushes from Emilia, a scrap of laborious, loving roundhand from little Dick. Her first impulse on receiving them is a triumphant longing to show them to Burnet—Burnet, whose eyebrows she has seen so insolently rise at her statement of her own indispensability. Reflection shows her that such a course would be undignified, puerile, impossible; but the consciousness of having such a large stone by her to sling at him, in case of further incredulity, makes her distinctly less uncivil to him for three days after their arrival. One afternoon

she is sitting beside the sick-bed; and, as its occupant has not spoken for a quarter of an hour, and his eyes are closed, she imagines that he has fallen into one of those faint, fitful dozes that ease the heaviness of an invalid's long day. Being, as she thinks, off duty, her look is resting with an unconscious keenness of wonder, speculation, and pity on the faded discontent, the satiric puckers—satiric even in sleep—of his small, sharp face. She starts with a frightened jump at the sound of his voice, thoroughly awake, and not at all pleased.

"Might I take the liberty, my dear, of asking the cause of the microscopic scrutiny with which you are favoring me?"

"I—I was only wondering about you," she answers, stammering.

"Very good of you to take the trouble, I am sure," he answers, sourly; but I think, if it is all the same to you, I had almost as soon that you would leave off."

"I was thinking no harm," she answers, steadily, though not disrespectfully; "I have no objection to telling you what I was thinking; I was only wondering how it was that you, who are so absolutely impenetrable to any one's influence, should be so docile to the slightest hint of—of—Dr. Burnet's." She speaks the two last words with a slight lagging hesitation, as if her tongue had a distaste for the sound of them.

"H'm! is that all?"

"What *is* the secret of this great influence with you?" she says, gathering boldness, her curiosity getting the upper hand of that timidity which is indeed no part of her character.

"Since you are so anxious to know," he replies, crossly, "though I confess myself unable to see what business it is of yours, let me tell you that he is the one honest man I have ever met!"

She is silent for a moment reflecting; then—

"Surely you have been unlucky," she says, fixing her healthy, limpid eyes incredulously upon him, "if in the whole course of your long life you have met only one honest man."

"My long life!" he repeats, pettishly; "I am much obliged to you, my dear, but not so very monstrously long, after all; you need not make me out such a Methuselah."

For the moment Gillian is rebuffed, but presently she returns to the charge.

"But how has he shown his honesty?" she asks, a little persistently.

"Good God, Gillian!" replies her father, in a fury, "what do you mean by putting me through such a d——d catechism? 'Pon my soul, I will not stand it!"

There is no doubt that the subject must be dropped, and so Gillian sees. She remains dissatisfiedly mute, and there is no sound save the roll of brisk carriages in the square, the sharp twitter of cockney sparrows, and the bell of St. Chad's ringing to afternoon prayer. It is the sick man himself who by and by resumes the conversation.

"Perhaps, *ma belle*," he says, in a voice which sufficiently shows that his temper has not yet recovered from the ruffling which her point-blank questions had caused it, "you yourself might condescend to feel a little indebted to a person who had made you a present of ten additional years of life."

Her eyes have wandered absently away to the half-veiled window—to the toilet-table, with its elaborate load of beautifying apparatus, its unguents and essences.

At his words they return, interested and attentive, to his face. A question hovers on the edge of her lips; but a timely remembrance of the ill reception of her last inquiries makes her content herself with looking interrogative.

"Ten years ago," says the invalid, in a cross and grudging voice, "since you must know all about it, all the first men in London had given me up. They said, 'You are a dead man!' I said, 'Begging your pardons, I am nothing of the kind.' 'We give you three months!' they said. Only an operation could save me, and not one of them—I give you

my word of honor—not one of them had the pluck to undertake it!"

He pauses, and petulantly whisks with his pocket-handkerchief at a fly that has settled on the discolored marble of his sick brows.

"Do not go on if it tires you," she says, gently; but he takes not the smallest notice of her polite solicitude.

"Just at that moment," he continues, in the same exasperated voice, "an accident brought me acquainted with Burnet. I explained my case to him; he—I suppose you will allow me to spare you the surgical details—or perhaps," with a crabbed laugh, "you insist upon having them in full too? Well, the long and the short of it was that he pulled me through, and I can assure you that I was vastly obliged to him, and with your permission take the liberty of being so still."

A pause. By and by—

"That was not *honesty*," says Gillian, doggedly, "that was skill; I do not see how that proves his honesty."

"Very well, my dear, very well!" replies her father, crossly, plucking at the sheets, with his forehead puckered into a fretful frown, and his pale lips irritably quivering; "then he is not honest, he is dishonest; he is the most dishonest rogue out of Newgate! You may tell him so if you choose. Now is your time—here he comes."

In effect, while he has been speaking, the door has opened, and Burnet has appeared on his daily visit.

"Tell him what?" he says, composedly, looking from the malign amusement of the little old man's withered face to the scarlet discomfiture of his blooming daughter's.

"He is all attention; now is your time, Gillian," repeats the invalid, chuckling; "you can never have a better opportunity. What! are you going?"—for she has fled to the door—"nay, that is a pity. You have always been wishing to be able to amuse me; you were just beginning to succeed."

Long after she has reached the haven of her little sitting-room his small, mocking voice still sounds in her ears, cold and stinging. Though no one is there to see it, her face still burns and smarts with that agonizing blush. It seems to prevent her reading or working or occupying herself in any way. It is occupation enough in itself. She lies in a low *causeuse* before the fire; her flax head thrown back on the cushion, and her two slim hands covering her face. She does not remove them even at the sound of the opening door. Doubtlessly it is the ministering charwoman bringing her reading-lamp, for the dark has fallen. It is only when her ears become aware of two sets of footsteps, and of a rustling gown —charwomen never rustle—that she lifts her head and looks up. A girl's light figure is coming toward her in the firelight. In a moment she has recognized one of the people out of her former life—that already, though it ended only a fortnight ago, seems so wondrously far off—has sprung up and flung two most welcoming arms round the neck of Sophia Tarlton.

"You poor soul!" cries the latter, in a surprised voice, partially smothered as well as surprised through the violence of Gillian's embrace, "what a very low ebb you must be at to be so dreadfully glad to see even me!"

"Was not I always glad to see you?" cries Gillian, loosing her hold, while her mind reverts to the past; and she is fain to admit to herself, with a feeling of astonishment, the extremely lukewarm nature of her joy on the occasion of the visits of any and every member of the Tarlton family.

"You were glad," rejoins the other, shrewdly, "but not nearly so glad. Do you know that at first I thought you must have mistaken me for some one else; are you quite sure that you know who I am?"

"Quite sure," replies Gillian, laughing a little confusedly. Then, to prove that there is no mistake, she adds, "How is Anne?"

"She is very well," replies Anne's sister, indifferently. "I

wanted her to come with me here to-day, but she is gone instead to Paddington, to see a supposed admirer off. Between you and me, he tried his best to dissuade her, but you know poor Anne's way. I can not understand that sort of thing, can you? I have such a notion of making one's self respected, have not you? Anne has no self-respect."

She gives this last damning sisterly verdict with a cheerful voice and an unclouded countenance.

"How is Mrs. Tarlton? How is the General?" says Gillian, hardly heeding her visitor's affectionate speech, still broadly smiling at the thought of being again in actual contact with a bit of her home life, and lovingly uttering some of the familiar names, even of some of the least dear.

"They have not spoken to each other for a week," says Sophia, making a face; "is it not puerile of them? We are all up at Garland's Hotel for a fortnight; they send messages to each other by the waiters at dinner. We are so ashamed of them!"

Both girls sit down, and there is a moment's pause, while Sophia is looking inquisitively round.

"Come, you are not so much to be pitied!" she says, when her sharp eyes have made the tour of the room. "I think I expected a fireless garret; you have arm-chairs, flowers"—enumerating the little details of luxury, as her look falls on each in turn—"I suppose the gardener sent you up the flowers from home."

"I suppose so," replies Gillian, in a rather confused voice.

Then, her natural veracity getting the upper hand, she adds, hastily:

"No; they did not come from home; they came from—I do not quite know where they came from."

"And you never asked?" in a tone of alert and inquisitive interest.

"No."

"You can not even guess?"

"No—o—o." Then, somewhat impatiently, "What does it matter where they came from, now that they are here? Not but what," eyeing them rather spitefully, "I could do extremely well without them."

A short silence.

"And you will stay here," says Sophia, leaning forward, and shading her unpretty but acute face from the fire with the muff, "until—"

"Yes; I suppose so until—" replies Gillian.

Neither of them says until what. There are things that, though it is not brutal to think, it is brutal to say.

"And what will you do then?"

"What shall I do then?" cries Gillian, excitedly. "Why, what shall I be likely to do? Why, put myself into the very first train, of course, and go home; I am afraid they are all going to rack and ruin already without me! Have you seen them? Do they seem very wretched?"

"I lunched there on Wednesday," replies Sophia, rather slowly; "they all looked much as usual, except that Jane sat at the head of the table, and struck me as taking the lead a good deal; but, of course," seeing Gillian's countenance fall a little, "one can not judge in the least by a casual half-hour like that."

"Of course not!" very quickly. "I am so glad," with a touch of her old self-esteem, "that they get on at all."

"You are looking better than I expected," says Sophia, presently, still shading her face from the blaze, while she surveys with the keen and unenvious admiration of a completely plain woman the hotly flushed face and beautiful vexed eyes of her companion; "I was afraid that the sitting up at night might have knocked you up."

"I never sit up at nights," replies Gillian, dryly.

"The day nursing, then?—the confinement to a sick-room?—the continued standing?"

"Sometimes, for two days together, I never enter the sick-room."

Sophia raises her eyebrows.

"Then what is the use of your being here?"

"There is no use."

"But whose fault is it?" in a tone of surprised curiosity.

"You had better ask Dr. Burnet. Perhaps," with an extremely caustic accent—"perhaps you are not aware that he is master here?"

"But why should he try to keep you out?" cries Sophia, with blunt common sense—"what object could he have?"

"His motives," replies Gillian, stiffly, "are best known to himself. I have no wish to meddle with them."

There is such a pregnant spitefulness in her tone that Sophia breaks into a laugh:

"You certainly do not think very highly of them." After reflecting for a few moments, "But you see," in a consoling tone, "however great his influence with your father may be, he could not prevent his wishing to see you—he could not prevent his sending for you?"

"He did not send for me," cries Gillian, almost loudly, sitting bolt-upright in her chair, and giving vent at last to the flood of bottled mortification and ire that has been seething and boiling in her breast for fourteen angry days—"he did not want to see me! I bore him inexpressibly! I could not have believed," with a slight quiver in her voice, "that I ever could have bored any one as I do him! No, it was Dr. Burnet's doing; it was his fiat that I should come, so of course I came"

"And he fetched you himself?" says Sophia, very slowly, opening her shrewd eyes; and with a long-drawn breath of astonishment—"a man in such practice as he! for I must tell you, my dear, that we are looked upon as crassly ignorant not to have heard of him—in fact, our good health is our only

excuse. How *did* he afford to waste twenty-four hours in capturing you?"

Whether there is something in the word "wasted" that jars on Gillian's still thriving self-esteem, or whether the whole frame and tone of the sentence are displeasing to her, there is certainly a good deal of acrimony in her voice, as she answers, hotly:

"I do not know why every one has *se donne le mot* to sing his praises. I am not a prejudiced person" (a short smile steals over Miss Tarlton's features); "I only know that here is a perfect stranger, who has, by means best known to himself, obtained the most complete ascendancy over my father; while I, his own daughter, am absolutely nothing—less than nothing; ordered about like a dog, at everybody's beck, and afraid to call my soul my own."

There is something so very unamenable to anybody's orders, so thoroughly refractory in her whole appearance as she makes this statement, in her lofty carriage her resolute lips and blazing eyes, that again Sophia smiles.

"It must be at least a new sensation," she says, slyly.

Then, rising from her chair, and beginning to rehook the fur collar round her neck—

"Well, I suppose I must be going. I half expected that Anne would have joined me here; but I suppose, poor dear, she is still sobbing on the platform at Paddington. *Au revoir!*"

CHAPTER IX.

"A moment's halt— a momentary taste
Of being from the well amid the waste;
And, lo! the phantom caravan has reached
The nothing it set out from—oh, make haste!"

THE fortnight has rolled itself out into a month. January lies stretched on her death-bed, and snowdrop-crowned Febru-

ary stands a-tiptoe, waiting to step into her departing sister's shoes.

In this world something is always standing ready to shove something else off into the dark. Down at North-country Marlowe, the winter aconities, with their little green shoulders shrugged up to their ears to keep the cold out, make the brown borders gay. But here in the square garden, no small, cheerful, yellow face shows itself smiling through the sooty, smutty earth-crust. The days haste past, monotonous and speedy—for monotony is ever quick. If we would fain make our tiny life taste long, we should do something different on each of our scanty days. At the end of twenty years we should know how Methuselah felt.

Gillian has seen eight-and-twenty gray days race past her, no one of them either much better or much worse than its fellows. Occasionally, indeed, the gray has been freaked and speckled with spots of black when, for instance, the knife of her father's caustic tongue has cut deeper than its wont, or she has returned with bristled pride and bleeding vanity from some sharper than usual brush with Burnet. For, with a resolute consistency that would have raised her to eminence in any profession, she has maintained her attitude of overt enmity, and hardly less overt suspicion, toward her father's doctor. And he, being perhaps by nature of a temper hardly more suave or meek than her own, has long given up all attempt to conciliate her, and now meets her readily with her own weapons of sour looks, captious answers, and stinging repartees. And meanwhile the cause that has brought them into contact is slowly but most surely disappearing, journeying inevitably from the *is* to the *is not*.

Some of us give up our life at one throw, tossing it to death, crying, "Since you must have it, take it all, and at once!" Others fight it out, little inch by little inch, clutching at the last poor rag with tight clinging fingers. And this is how Gillian's father is going. From day to day there is perhaps

not much change to be noticed; the same tedious routine of invalid duties wearisomely gone through. But looking back a week or a fortnight, it is seen that many little practices, involving even a small exertion, have been discontinued. The sick palate turns with even greater distaste from the light and delicate food. The sea of death is patently encroaching on the shores of life's lessening continent. It is true that he still has his French novels read aloud to him; that he still passes ironical encomiums on his daughter's accent, and seldom fails to remind her of Fraulein Schwarz's unfortunate compliment; that he still chuckles to his pillow over the memory of his primeval *bonnes fortunes*. But every day the chuckle waxes fainter; the portion of Zola and Belot smaller; the venom of his sneers at his patient daughter less. For, in the case of anything so frail and perishing and ruined, who would not be patient? Even impatient Gillian. Whether it be her patience or the pleasure that such sick eyes must reap from the sight of her strength and bloom, or the discovery, that she never rustles or jingles as she walks, that her hands are always cool and clever, and her young arms strong and willing—certain it is that, as the days go on, she is summoned ever oftener, and oftener, and for ever longer periods to his side; dismissed ever more and more grudgingly. And, now that the end draws near, she is scarcely ever absent.

It is true, indeed, that the invalid still puts himself to a good deal of trouble to prove to her how absolutely null and void her influence with him is. He still ostentatiously postpones her opinion to that of his doctor; still takes a malicious, though perhaps partially æsthetic, pleasure in calling the splendid red to her cheeks, and the daggers to her great eyes, by making her render a furious obedience to some mandate or—much more often—recommendation of Burnet's. Often has she been dismissed from her duties with legs trembling from long standing, with hot head and aching eyes, but still foaming with rage at having obtained her release—rest, food, and necessary

fresh air—from the hand of her enemy. For Gillian is nothing if not consistent, and he is her enemy still.

Latterly, ever since Burnet's patient and Gillian's father has begun distinctly to decline, and Burnet's daily visits have consequently multiplied from one to two, and sometimes even three, they have been a great deal in each other's company. Often her small and incapable hands have met his in raising, or turning, or giving some new ease of posture to him that is in the unending restlessness of dying. Often their grave eyes ask and answer each other's questions when speech would fret the sick man's irritable ear, or chase his feverish sleep. Often, too, outside his door, they have talked together low and quickly; the one giving the directions which he knows will be carried out with so punctilious a minuteness, the other listening with teachable gravity, and heedfully laying them to heart. And yet, behind and under all their hand-meetings, eye-speakings, and amiable dialogues, there is on both sides a mutual understanding that all this is without prejudice to the real and genuine attitude of their minds toward each other; that this is but the truce of God. Behind it, behind it all, this forced intimacy and compelled civility, still flourishes the old hostility, ready and waiting to be taken up by either or both on the first convenient opportunity. Probably that opportunity is now not far off.

It is the 1st of February—one of those gentle, soft-breathed days that sometimes come in suave bands of two and three, in that month of promises which March so rarely performs. The air that outside is whispering sweetly to the young buds, and waking snowdrop and crocus out of their earth-sleep, weighs faint and heavy in the shut sick-room. Gillian has been on her legs for the best part of a day and a night; for, despite the presence of the nurse, her father's fading eyes querulously follow, his dry lips crossly ask the reason of, her every exit.

He has been worse all day; more full of unrest, more

feeble, spent. His dwindling stock of strength has been still further reduced by the exhaustion consequent on a long interview with his lawyer on the day before, an interview wished for by himself, and much encouraged by Burnet.

It is evening now—eight o'clock. The lights of broughams and hansoms carrying people out to dinner flash past, and the lamps make red points at regular intervals round the dark square. For the moment Gillian is not wanted. She has slipped away to her own room; and, after standing drowsily at the open window for a few minutes, with eyelids continually down-dropping in utter mastering sleepiness over her eyes, has exchanged her gown for a dressing-gown, and has thrown herself on the bed, promising herself to awake in half an hour.

In an instant she is heavily asleep: one of those bottomless slumbers across which the hours race without leaving a mark. If she is left to herself it will be morning—high-noon, perhaps—ere she wake. But she is not fated to sleep her sleep out. At what hour of the night she knows not; but there comes a moment when a noise of some kind first sets her dreaming; then mixes madly with her dream; then breaks it—a noise which, as she sits up and tries to clear her muddled senses, resolves itself into a quick and imperative knocking at her door.

In an instant she has sprung off the bed, and run barefoot to open it. The candle she had left burning on her table is still alight, though it is burned down in the socket. By its weak light she sees Burnet's face—always grave—but now with an undefinable new gravity on it, meeting hers.

"Come," he says, curtly.

"Is he worse?" she cries, brought back in a moment to perfect wakefulness by his one pregnant word.

"Yes."

"Is it—is it—the end?" with a little break in her voice.

"Yes."

Without another syllable she follows him. The sick-room

door is wide open; and through it a potent draught of air meets them as they enter. All the three windows are flung wide; and through them the chilly night gusts freely drive. The nurse stands by the bedside, ceaselessly waving a large fan, and yet all this air is impotent to give ease to one poor pair of toiling lungs.

Raised by many high pillows into what is virtually a sitting posture, the sick man lies with eyes awake and conscious, and parted lips dry and parched by the passage of the laboring breath. It seems as if to each breath a heavy stone were tied, so laboriously does he drag it up. And none can help him with that dread burden.

Gillian stands at the bed-foot, her hands painfully locked together, her large, bright eyes—the sleep driven far from them—fixed, in all the astonied fear of one that looks on death for the first time, on the painful fight going on before her. Every now and then she sharply draws a long, gasping breath, with a sort of unconscious feeling that *that* may help him. She is not aware that great tears of uttermost pity have stolen into her eyes, and are dropping down her cheeks. She is almost as much startled as if one had spoken to her from among the dead, when she hears her father's voice addressing her—slowly, indeed, with many breaks between, but still the same voice that had sneeringly eulogized her French accent three days ago.

"Pray—do not—cry—Gillian! No one—has ever—won—anything from me by tears! Smiles, my dear—smiles!"

There is even a streak of the old coxcombry in the almost extinguished voice. She can not bear it. She feels as if her own breast were bursting in two. In a moment she has fled, without noise, from the room; and sitting down on the topmost step of the stairs, outside, covers her face with her hands, and sobs. Perhaps the sound of her own weeping has hindered her hearing Burnet's footsteps following her. At all events, when she looks up, she finds him standing beside her.

"Can not you do anything?" she cries, almost fiercely, and

shuddering, as through the open door come, without ceasing, the sound of that weary laboring and the noise of the useless winnowing of the fan.

"Nothing!"

"Are you *utterly* powerless?"

"Utterly!"

"What is the use of your art, then?" she cries, with passionate unreason, raising her head, with its little tossed hair-tendrils falling untidy and soft about her brow, and the drowned stars of her impatient, suffering eyes to his face.

"It never pretended to be as strong as death," he answered, sadly.

"Oh, how cruel it is!" she cries, throwing her head down on her knees. "If it is so bad now, what must it be when one loves a person? You know; it is your trade—what must it be?"

"It will soon be over," he replies, evading that answerless question.

"Is there no one in the whole world that loves him?" she says, with a tone of keen pain, almost remorse, in her broken voice. "Oh, how thankful I should be if there was only a *dog* that was sorry for him!"

As she speaks, she looks up again with a sort of appeal into her companion's serious eyes, half hoping that he will say he is sorry. She would probably call him a hypocrite if he did but still she is angry with him and disappointed that he does not. Instead:

"If you are so completely upset," he says, rather coldly, "you had better not come back. I called you because, as he is still perfectly conscious, I thought that there might be something he wished to say to you; but I can not have his last moments disturbed."

There is something in his tone that at once opens again the passage that seemed closing in her throat—that almost dries the tears that have already fallen on her cheeks. In an instant

she has risen to her feet, and stands beside him, tall and still

"I am not upset," she answers, with a great struggle to be calm, "only it is the first time that I have seen any one die; and, though it is now such a matter of course to you, perhaps there was a time when it would have moved even you a little."

So saying, she passes at once back into the sick room, and takes up her former situation at the bed-foot, he at the bed-head, she at the bed-foot; and so they stand through the watches of the long night. Sometimes their eyes meet and interrogate each other; sometimes he looks at her when she is not looking at him. Her attitude is always the same: the hands painfully squeezing each other; the forehead gathered into distressful puckers; the throat—usually, when he has seen her, so stiffly guarded by a well-starched linen collar—gleaming fairly from the open neck of her dressing-gown; the hair, generally in so tight and sleek a bondage, drooping loosely about her ears, in itself entirely altering the character of her face, and making her look twenty times as meek as he had ever imagined that she could look.

And the hours wear on: the night-gusts blowing the curtains into frolic shapes; the fan monotonously waving; the tussle for a little breath—only a little breath—for ever raging. At last there comes a moment when the night and the morning meet; when the wind cuts coldly, and the candles flare, and that voice, for which so little further speech is in store, is once more heard.

"Where—is—Burnet?"

"I am here."

"I suppose," turning a little in the bed, as though he would turn his unseeing eyes in the direction whence the voice came, "I suppose—that the—performance—is nearly—over?"

"Very nearly."

(Can it be Burnet's harsh voice that speaks?—speaks in tones of such pitying gentleness, as if he would fain take the sting out of the bitter sentence it has to utter?)

There is a little pause; then the dying man's meager hand blindly travels toward his one friends', and faintly grasps it.

"But—for—you—the curtain—would have—fallen—ten—years ago!"

Burnet does not answer in words, but his vigorous right hand kindly closes on the nerveless fingers, and delicately presses them.

"I—wish—you could—give me—another—ten!"

These are the last articulate words ever uttered by Thomas Latimer on this side of the silence!

CHAPTER X.

Now he is buried; followed to his grave among Kensal Green's multitudinous miscellaneous dead by Squire Marlowe, whom he has cut for fifteen years, and by a great many empty carriages. All that is now left of him is the will, in which he states his wishes as to the disposition of the two hundred and odd thousand pounds which he would have liked to take with him, and could not. His survivors have but lately been put in possession of its conditions; and two of them, the Squire and Gillian, have, for the best part of two hours, been hotly debating them, and are now, at four o'clock in the afternoon, much where they were when they set out.

"It is monstrous!" cries the Squire for the sixteenth time, fussing up and down the room on his short legs, with his gray hair staring like a horse's coat on a cold day, and his hands thrust into the pockets of the easy old shooting-clothes, for which he has already hastened to exchange the decorous mourning suit, in which he took that dismal drive this morning in a coal-black mourning coach, drawn by two long-tailed inky steeds. "Such a will could not stand! I have never had

much to say to lawyers, thank God! but it does not require lawyers to tell one what common sense and common justice mean. I do not believe there is a jury in England who would not bring a man in of unsound mind for making it."

"If all the juries in Great Britain and Ireland pronounced him mad," replies Gillian, firmly, "they would not convince me. He was as sane as I am."

She is standing, long and craped, beside the fire: a foot on the fender, a black elbow on the chimney-piece.

"Stuff and nonsense!" cries the Squire, quickening his fidgety walk almost into a run, and wrought up into a state of mind when he actually dares to have an opinion of his own adverse to that expressed by his niece. "Would a man in his right senses have kept his wife's—my poor sister's—picture with its face turned to the wall for twenty years, and then left it to me, saying that he hoped I should get more satisfaction out of it than he had ever got out of the original? Would a man in his right senses have done that?"

But Gillian only gives a dogged shake with her blonde head.

"He was no more out of his senses than I am," she repeats.

"Well, well, we will see about that—we will see about that," rejoins the Squire, evasively; even now—so strong is habit—not daring to persist in overt contradiction of one whose yea has been his yea and her nay his nay for six submissive years. "We will have the best legal opinion without an hour's delay. Blank is our man, Saunder's says; he is the best man at the equity bar"—Saunders is the family solicitor. "He, Saunders, has already written to ask him to appoint an hour for a consultation."

There is a slight pause. Gillian is looking absently down at her own nicely pointed foot, and sliding it softly to and fro along the fender top.

"After all," she says, slowly and without looking up, "I suppose that he had a right to do as he liked with his own; to leave his money to whom, and shackled with what condi-

tions he chose. It is not"—speaking with a heavy emphasis, and lifting her eyes, darkened by an expression of the profoundest resentment—"it is not *him* that I blame!"

"I never was so deceived in a fellow in my life," says the Squire, ruefully. "I thought I knew an honest man when I saw him. He had an honest eye, not afraid to look you in the face; he gave you a good, honest hand-grip when he shook hands with you. I wish"—taking one of his own broad hands out of his pocket, and repentantly surveying it—"I wish I had not shaken hands with him."

"You know, dear," says Gillian, in a caressing voice that still conveys a very distinct reproach in it—an unmistakably told-you so voice—"you know that, from the first moment I saw him, I told you that he had a bad countenance; you pooh-poohed me as prejudiced. I am sure I do not want to say anything that will make you feel more unhappy than you do already; but I leave you to judge whether the result has justified me?"

"It has—it has!" replies her uncle, remorsefully. "I am sure, Gill," with a humble little attempt at self-defence, "it is not often that I set up my opinion against yours; generally what you say, I swear to."

"I am sure, dear," rejoins the girl, laying her white hand on his shoulder with the protecting action of a stooping angel, "that I have no wish to bias your opinion in matters in which it is likely to be more valuable than my own; but I think that in matters of instinct, if you would allow yourself to be guided by me, you might perhaps make fewer mistakes."

"I will—I will!" in a tone of almost tearful contrition; then, with a sudden wondering return to his original text, "I can not take it in yet! I never was so deceived in a fellow in my life!"

Another pause. Gillian has by this time sunk into an arm chair, and now lies there meditatively, with her elbows resting on the arms, and the tips of her fingers lightly joined together.

"If they give it against us," she resumes, presently, with a slight shrug—"I have a presentment that they will—why, we must just return to our old ways. I am not proud, dear; I am not above being beholden to you for food and lodging. I think"—looking up into his face with an affectionate but self-confidant smile—"I think that I am worth my keep to you."

"I should rather think you were!" cries he, with emphasis. "I can not tell you how many times since you have been gone I have caught myself saying, 'I will tell Gill,' 'I will ask Gill,' before I could pull myself up and remember that there was no Gill to ask."

"There will always be a Gill to ask for the future," replies she, smiling.

"I am sure I do not want to complain of the children," he goes on, wrinkling up his grizzled eyebrows, and staring down at the Persian rug at his feet, with an air of perplexed discomfort. "I suppose they are much like other people's; but it seems that, since you went, some of them are a bit inclined to kick over the traces."

"Which of them?" asks the girl, sharply, sitting upright in her chair, and quickly abandoning her [illegible]ive attitude; "Jane, I am sure!"

"I have no complaint to make o[illegible]ane," he continues, irresolutely; "she is a fine, spirited girl; and I suppose I forget how time flies. I have always been in the habit of thinking of her as such a complete child."

"And so she is!" cries Gillian, with some warmth; "only fifteen last August!"

"She gave me quite a shock the other day; she has had such a grown-up look of late. I do not know what she has done to herself? What can she have done to herself?" appealingly, with a puzzled air, to his neice; but Gillian is biting her lips, and keeps a vexed silence.

"She has been teasing me out of my life," pursues the Squire resuming his fussy constitutional up and down the carpet, "to

send away Fraulein Schwarz. She says she is past the age you were when you left the school-room."

"There is not the slightest parallel between the cases," cries Gillian, angrily, and reddening.

"She says," continues the Squire, docilely repeating his lesson, "that she is sure that she has learned all that Fraulein Schwarz can teach her, and that she could devote herself so much more to me if her time were freer."

"Of course you told her to hold her tongue, and go back to her lesson books," says Gillian, irefully, fixing a commanding eye upon her interlocutor.

"Of course—of course," very hastily; then, looking rather sheepish, and beginning to flounder, "at least I do not exactly remember what I said—one does not remember these trifles with any accuracy. She means well, poor girl," glancing with a deprecatory air at the severe young figure in the elbow-chair; "I am sure she means well—she says she wants to be my right hand."

"In fact, dear," rejoins Gillian, with a little scornful laugh, "she has managed to get very completely on your blind side! But do not worry yourself; all this will right itself when I come home. We will see," shaking her head with a determined gesture, and passing her arm with familiar fondness through his, as she joins in his tramp, tramp—"we will see who will be right-hand then."

. . . . . .

By and by their colloquy comes to a close. The Squire goes out to his club, and Gillian remains alone, plunged in the soft depths of the short-legged arm-chair, in which she has, during the last month, spent so many solitary hours. The lamp burns beside her, but its light does not tempt her to any employment. But, if her hands are idle, so is not her brain. It is working and seething with a hundred wrathy, vengeful thoughts. Sometimes her lips move, as she repeats to herself, almost aloud, the murderously cutting home-truths which she is com-

posing, in order to address, at some opportunity or opportunities unknown, to the sordid schemer who has defrauded her of her birthright. They are not finished at all too soon. In fact, the occasion for using them is much nigher at hand than she thinks. She is just in the act of mentally polishing and giving a finer edge to a last one that, as she complacently thinks, bids fair to excel in corrosive bitterness all its predecessors, when the entrance of a servant—no charwoman this time, but the Squire's own man—calls her back to present life.

"Dr. Burnet wishes to speak to you, ma'am."

Here, then, is the opportunity for which she has been arming herself with gun and sharp sword through the last busy hour. And this is how she meets it :

"Tell him I am engaged," she says, hurriedly.

"He says he must speak to you at once, ma'am—that it is on most urgent business."

She has risen to her feet. At such a crisis, who could remain seated ?

"Tell him," she says, in a voice that, though low and trembling, is yet inexpressibly haughty, "that I decline to receive him !"

"But you *will*—but you SHALL—but you MUST !" cries another voice, in tones how different from the unemotional ones of the placid valet ! and, as he speaks, Burnet pushes hastily past his messenger into the room, and, thrusting him out with scant ceremony, shuts the door and confronts her.

"Do you dare to force yourself upon me in the face of my distinct refusal to see you ?" she says, pantingly, flaming out into crimson anger.

"I do !" he answers ; "whether you like it or not, I *will* be heard ! You *shall* hear me !"

Her only answer is to move hurriedly toward the door ; but, before she can reach it, he has put his back against it. His

face, ordinarily set in so professional a calm, is as white as ashes; his usually quiet shrewd eyes burn like fire.

"It is no use," he says, in a low voice. "Why you should wish not to hear me, I do not know; but, whether you wish it or not, you *shall!*"

There is such an absolute iron certainty in his look and voice that she stops short, quelled, in spite of herself.

"You know," he says, "of course you know that I have come to speak to you about this—this—" he hesitates, as if seeking an adjective strenuous enough; but, finding none to his mind, ends by employing none—"this *will*."

"Of course!"

It would be difficult for any one to infuse into two short words a more potent compound of sarcasm and ice than Gillian succeeds in doing into these.

"You know its contents?"

"Yes!"

The "Yess" is even better of its kind than the "Of course," and so she feels with some satisfaction.

"That, with the exception of a few trifling legacies, Mr. Latimer has left his whole property in land, money, houses, etc,, to you, on the condition that on attaining your twenty-first birthday you give your hand in marriage to me?"

It is impossible for her lips to give verbal assent to such a proposition as this. It is degradation enough to have to acknowledge, even as she does it, by the most microscopic movement of eyelid and head that their two names have ever been bracketed together by any one.

"With the penalty attached, that, if you fail to fulfill this condition, the entire property goes to me?"

He speaks very rapidly, as if the words were indescribably disagreeable to him, and he were trying to get them over as quickly as he may. He is answered by another inclination of the head; if possible, more imperceptible than the former one.

"If, on the other hand," he goes on rapidly, "I decline to marry you" (an expression of unspeakable insolence, a sort of "I'll at is so likely!" look, steals over her face—he does not give one the idea of being short-sighted, and he had need to be short-sighted, indeed, not to see it), "the whole goes to you, without further restriction, to dispose of absolutely as you choose?"

She makes no comment beyond that slight insulting smile.

He has left his guardianship of the door, and has come a pace or two nearer to her.

"Of course you will do me the justice to acknowledge that this has come upon me with as great a shock as it could on you?"

Then at last she speaks.

"You must excuse me," she says, slowly, "but I decline to answer that question!"

"You *must* know," coming several steps nearer to her, and looking hard at her, as if he distrusted the evidence of his own eyes and ears—"you *must* know that I was as ignorant of the disposition of his money affairs as you could be."

But again that obstinate, pregnant silence and that maddening smile are his only answer.

There is a short pause; then:

"Is—it—possible?" he says, rather hazily, catching at a chair back to steady himself, as if he felt dizzy. "It has been staring me in the face, and I *would not* see it! If that is your opinion of me," beginning to speak very fast, in a concentrated low voice, "do not let me lose a second in relieving your mind! Let me tell you that I absolutely and entirely repudiate and refuse my share in this lunatic bargain! Let me assure you—Good God! does it need saying?—not upon my honor, for you do not think that I have any, but upon whatever is strongest and most sacred to you—if anything is—*that I had rather be flayed alive than marry a woman under such*

conditions! I should have thought," with an accent of the most icy scorn, "that I need not have told you that."

He does not need the back of the chair to steady him now. Upright and alone he stands, with a face as white as the dead, and eyes of such burning choler as seem to shrivel her up.

She has no answer to make to him. She only stands stupidly staring at him; dully feeling, even at this moment, that she has never really seen the man before; has never till now known what he veritably looks like. Without one word left her of all the many bitter ones she had but now planned to speak to him, she stands there, the insolent smile stone-dead on her lips.

"This, then, is what you have been fearing?" he goes on, after a pause, in a voice out of which the excitement has quite gone, and which expresses only the coolest, calmest, most bottomless contempt. "Certainly this was not a danger to be trifled with! This is the key to that conduct which has seemed to me so inexplicable, over which I have puzzled my head as over a hard riddle! I have been dull. What a pity that I did not conjecture which way your apprehensions were tending; I might have saved you an anxious month!"

Still not a sound in answer. Her great, gray eyes, wide and staring, are still fastened, as if against her will, on his face—that face from which they have hitherto looked disdainfully away, when they chanced to fall upon it, as if from some unhandsome sight.

"If you remember," he goes on in the same key, "you once asked me what my motive was in bringing you here? I did not then perceive the drift of your question. I see it now."

She does not even try to speak. She seems to have become a mere listening machine.

"I refused to answer you then, being aware that you were prepared to disbelive any explanation I could give you. Per-

haps now you will be more willing to attach credence to what I say; if not," with a slight shrug, "it is no great matter."

She thrusts out her hands toward him, with a gesture of warding off—forbidding.

"Do not give me any explanation," she says, indistinctly; "I do not want any."

But he goes on without heeding her, in that cold voice, perfectly composed now; the fire all turned to ice.

"I had, of course, been long aware of your father's indifference toward you—an indifference verging on antipathy; and seeing, as he drew toward his end, no diminution, but rather an increase, of this hostile feeling, I began to be seriously afraid lest—since he had never paid any heed to the world's opinion, and, indeed, thoroughly enjoyed flying in the face of convention and use—he might, as likely as not, take it into his head to disinherit you at the last moment, and leave his whole property to some public charity or charities."

He stops a moment as if to take breath, being, indeed, but little used to such long-winded speech.

She has sunk down on a chair, her legs failing her; her eyes still fastened on his stern, pale face.

"I had heard that you were handsome."

There is nothing in either words or tone to convey the idea, but yet it comes home to her with a stab of motification that even in this he had been disappointed.

"Beauty, as you know, had always great power over him. I thought that, perhaps, if he saw you, you might, even thus late, conciliate his good-will."

Again she puts out her hand with a gesture of passionate prohibition.

"Do not go on," she says, huskily; but again he pays no heed.

"I was sorry for you—for the matter of that," in bitter parenthesis, "I am sorry for you still. With great difficulty I obtained his permission to send for you. I resolved, at some

inconvenience to myself, to go and fetch you; there were so many things that could be better explained to you by word of mouth than in writing."

There is a slight pause. She has covered her face with both soft hands, but even through their shield she feels the thrust of those coldly just bright eyes, quite as clearly and plainly as when she was really meeting them.

"You know, perhaps, I need not remind you, how you met me—with how absolute a discourtesy—with how painstaking an incivility. I suppose that your suspicions of me were coincident with your acquaintance."

The bowed flax head stoops a little lower: the hands try to close more completely over the face. It seems to her intolerable that even so much of it as can be seen through the finger-chinks should be visible.

"Still I was not discouraged," goes on the distinct, incisive voice; "still I thought that perhaps your churlish behavior arose only from lack of manners, or was the outcome of some infirmity of temper; and so, as you know, I went on blunderingly trying to conciliate you. Had I known"—planting each word with bitter slowness—"to what motive you were attributing every common civility, I should have quickly discontinued my efforts."

There is silence—a silence so complete, so long, that Gillian begins to wonder whether he can have left the room without her hearing his step. But no! a hasty glance through the interstices of her fingers tells her that he is still there, standing motionless by the table; and now he speaks yet once again.

"You are young to be so suspicious," he says, with an accent of almost compassion; "life must have had but few disillusionments for you yet. Have you found common honesty so rare a quality that you could not credit with even it an absolute stranger of whom you knew nothing, who had done you no ill, would have done you, indeed, all the good he could, if you had let him? I will give you one piece of advice

which, as you may perhaps now believe, has no *arrière pensée* of my own interest in it. Do not go through life attributing the worst motives to every one you meet, and putting the most unfavorable construction upon their simplest actions. You may be cheated now and then, I confess; but, on the whole, you will be a happier woman."

And so he leaves the room a good deal more calmly than he entered it.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER night has passed; a new day has come. The sun has risen—this is a mere trope, for a London winter sun seldom rises—the sun has risen on a new Gillian. It was late when she fell asleep. To herself it seems as if she had not slept at all, and it is proportionately late when she heavily awakes.

Surely it can not be the same person who yesterday shook off sleep so lightly, and rose, fresh and strong and self-confident, willing to administer advice, help, or judicious admonition to any of her housemates that may require them; but thinking it but little likely that she should need them herself. And now—though that was only twenty-four hours ago—her high head lies low, her elastic self-esteem is groveling in the dust, crushed to the earth by the deserved contempt of a fellow creature's eyes.

It is the first time that Gillian has learned what it feels like to be completely despised. A day ago she would have owned, and would have been quite willing to own, that she might probably provoke dislike, hostility in some ill-constituted minds; but she would have calmly argued with you, have irrefutably proved to you that contempt was a feeling that could never be experienced toward her, seeing that there was nothing in her

to provoke it. And now she has read with a clearness that admits of no mistake a contempt so profound as to amount to compassion—and there can be none profounder—written all over a pale just face. She puts her fingers into her ears, in irrational misery, trying to drown the tones of that gravely scornful voice, which she hears quite as plainly as when its sound was in reality vibrating in her ear. There are few more unpleasant sensations than the being and having full cause to be thoroughly ashamed of one's self, more especially when for twenty complascent years one has held one's self in unbroken good esteem.

Gillian is weighed down by a shame that, when she reluctantly wakes, makes her bury her head in the bedclothes; makes it seem impossible to her to face the staring daylight. And yet it has to be faced, and not only it, but also the Squire, probably also Burnet. The one poor expiation that she can make—one quite unavoidable too—is to undeceive her uncle as quickly as possible; without delay to dig up the suspicions that she herself has planted in the wholesome soil of his guileless mind; to say to him as, in the six years of her reign over him, she has never yet once said, "You were right, and I was wrong!"

She hurries over her dressing, though she would much rather have dawdled over it till bed-time came round again, and hastens into the breakfast-room, where she finds the Squire already seated, dressed in the lugubrious decorum of his mourning suit, in which he does not look in the least like himself.

"You must forgive me for beginning without you, Gill," he says, looking up from his rasher; "but the fact is," in a rather important voice, "I am so full of business this morning. I am off to Saunders at once; we are to go together to ——'s chambers, at Lincoln's Inn, New Square; eleven is the hour he has appointed to see us."

She has laid her white hand on the shining broadcloth of

his black sleeve, as she has often laid it in guardian-angel admonition or rebuke before.

"You may save yourself the trouble, dear; you need not go.'

He looks up at her to see whether he has heard aright, dragging his brows together to get a clearer view of her fair Sphinx face.

"You need not consult your lawyers," she says, in a low voice turning aside her cheek a little, as if she disliked being looked at; "we—we—are all of one mind."

"What!" cries her uncle, dropping knife and fork with a clatter on his plate; "what! do you mean to say," in an astounded voice, "that you—you have made up your mind to —to take him, after all?"

"I have not the chance," she answers, with a pallid smile "he will not take me. He says"—making herself repeat his words with accurate distinctness—"he says that he would rather be flayed alive than marry me!"

"God bless my soul!" cries the Squire, bounding off his chair and on to his short legs, and utterly forsaking his stiffening bacon and his cooling egg.

"He thought," continues the girl, in the same carefully distinct voice, "that I should be too dear a bargain, even though backed by my two hundred thousand pounds."

"I never was so glad of anything in my life!" says the Squire, drawing a long, relieved breath, while his whole face breaks up into irrepressible smiles and curves, which, if he were a young girl, would be dimples, but, as he is an elderly man, are only an ingenious sunburnt fretwork of fine wrinkles. "After all, what else could he do? He would not have got it, either," with a dogged British head-shake; "they would have given it against him. Saunders says he is sure they would have given it against him. Did not I tell you?—but no!" magnanimously breaking short off; "what does it matter now what I told you, or what you told me?"

"It matters a great deal," she answers, in a voice that

sounds to his ears strangely moved. "If I had listened to your opinion, instead of being, as usual, so besotted about my own, I might have spared myself the humiliation of insulting, by my imbecile suspicions, a man who—"

She breaks off suddenly, with a sort of sobbing catch in her breath.

"Bless my heart!" says the Squire, hazily, looking so thoroughly bewildered by the altered attitude of his idol, by the fact of seeing his Dagon unaccountably precipitating herself from her six years' pedestal, as to be not quite sure of his own identity or hers either. "Bless my heart! What is it now? What can it matter to him what your opinion of him was? Why need he ever know it? I do not suppose," with a good-humored chuckle, "that you told him in so many words."

"Did I not?" she says, excitedly, lifting her humiliated, white face toward his. "I made it as clear to him as the sun in heaven; and he," letting her head droop on her heaving chest, and speaking with a slow accent of pain, "he did not take it in at first; when he did, he—he despised me, as I deserve."

"Despised you, did he!" cries her uncle, with an angry accent. "I wish I had caught him at it. After all, yours was the most natural conclusion in the world to come to. Appearances *were* very much against him; almost every one would have—"

"There, there," she cries, breaking into his consolatory speech with impatient irritation; "for Heaven's sake, do not let us go all over it again! It is done, and nothing in the world can make it undone again. I can only pray," with an energy of emotion in her quick tones, "that I may never in all my life be called upon to look him in the face again."

The Squire pulls one of his white whiskers with a dubious air.

"Hum!" he says: "I do not quite see how that is to be managed. You must remember that your father has, in the

case of what has actually happened occurring, appointed him your sole guardian."

She has not been looking at him as he spoke. Her eyes have been fixed morosely on the carpet. Now she raises them with an expression of bewildered consternation to his face.

"My guardian!" she stammers, indistinctly.

"Do not take it to heart, Gill," rejoins he, affectionately, mistaking the cause of her emotion. "I suppose you are thinking that it is about the biggest slight he could well have put upon me; and so it is. I will say for him, poor fellow, that he never, in all his life, missed an opportunity of doing me a nasty turn; however," pulling himself up, and looking rather scared at his own lapse from Christian charity, "however, he is dead and gone, and I am sure I am the last person to wish to say anything against him."

It is doubtful whether Miss Latimer hears one word of this little harangue. She is silent, it is true, and her ears are apparently, and her eyes certainly, wide open; but yet no look of intelligence or apprehension crosses her face.

"My guardian!" she repeats, mistily, half under her breath, as if trying to make herself understand the sense of these words.

"Of course, he may refuse to act," says the Squire, standing in front of his niece, a good deal surprised and a little frightened at her apparent petrifaction; "it is quite on the cards that he may refuse to act."

"Is it?" she says, eagerly, a ray of light and animation flashing into her eyes. "May he? Is it possible?"

"Of course it is," returns he, smiling at her ignorance (it is so very seldom that she avows herself more ignorant of anything than he); "it is optional. To be sure, it is an ungrateful office. One never gets any thanks for it, and it demands more time and trouble than I should think a busy man like him could well spare from his profession."

"If it is optional," she says, in a low voice and with a look

of profound relief, "of course he will refuse. We need not waste any more words upon it; the thing is certain."

"Do you think so?" says the Squire, dubiously. "No doubt your judgment is better worth having than mine" (she winces); "but I can not feel so sure of that. My idea is that he is one of those conscientious kind of chaps that would not think it right to shirk a thing merely because he disliked it. You know I always told you that I thought he looked—"

He stops in hasty confusion. He might as well have finished his sentence—the sentence she knows so horribly well.

"It is impossible!" she cries, breaking in with something of her old masterful tone and manner; "you do not know all the circumstances of the case!" (writhing a little). "If you did, you would judge as I do. It is not worth while wasting any more words upon it; a very short time will show who is right. And, meanwhile, pray let us drop the subject."

"With all my heart," replies the Squire, good-humoredly. "I am sure I can honestly say," glancing down, as he speaks, with an air of animosity at the raven gloss of his new funeral clothes, "my only wish is that we were rid of the whole business and back again at Marlowe, jogging along in our old way. By the by, Gill," consulting with a rather serious air his niece's tragic pale face, "you must remember that I have warned you that we have got rather out of gear while you have been away. I am afraid that you will find, when you get home, that some of your team require a good deal of driving."

"Do they?" she says, pricking her ears and drawing up her neck commandingly for a moment, from the force of habit; then, with a sudden and lamentable change of tone, "but I have no team. I never will again—I never will attempt to drive anybody. I am not fit. Is it possible," turning round in a fury upon the unoffending gentleman beside her, "that, after what has happened, you still believe in me?"

The last words die off into a sob; and, as she ends, being

overwrought and wretched, she hides her face on his shoulder and begins to cry.

"God bless me!" cries he, in a horrified voice, becoming aware of this phenomenon, for him it is indeed one (Gillian's tears have ever been most rare; and since her childhood he has hardly known their quality), "you are not going to be *ill*, Gill?" looking alarmedly round at the breakfast-table for restoratives, and seeing nothing of that kind but a pepper-caster. "Let me—let me," in a helpless, uncertain voice, as one that faces new and untried ills—"let me help you to the sofa and run and get some sal volatile for you?"

"Oh no, dear! why should you?" she answers in an irritable voice, raising herself hurriedly and wiping her eyes. "Can not you understand—" then breaks off, and after a pause, during which he eyes her nervously, she adds, in a more collected tone, and even smiling faintly, for something in the look of his awe-struck face tickles her—"Believe me, I never was further from fainting in my life."

"Were not you?" he answers doubtfully, "I am very glad to hear it, but you look odd, child! I suppose," glancing resentfully toward the window, "that it is this pestilential, used-up London air that has passed through three million pair of lungs before it has reached one's own. You will not be right," smiling anxiously, "till we get you down to Marlowe again, and set you to your old work."

"My old work!" she repeats, with a slight shudder and contraction of the brows—"my old work of going wrong myself, and setting every one else right. No! Heaven forbid that I begin that over again!" A moment later, taking hold of both his elderly hands with her lily-fair young ones, and looking impressively into his face—"Listen, dear! You know how implicitly you have always followed my advice; you know how habitually I have reversed our right positions; you know how often I have impressed upon you that my judgment, my instincts, were unerring. Well, if ever in the future I begin the

old story again, remind me of to-day—do you hear, dear?' excitedly pressing the hands she holds—"of to-day, February 5th, 187—. You will not forget, will you?"

But the Squire only stares disconsolately at her with disbelieving eyes and ears, and says, with a frightened accent:

"I wish, Gill, that you would let me get you some sal volatile!"

CHAPTER XII.

It is an hour or two later. The Squire has bustled off to his man of business to report to him the blessed change in the face of affairs, smiling beamingly, and kissing his hand to Gillian through the side window of the hansom, as he drives away. There is very little beam in the forced smile with which she answers him, and which disappears wholly the very instant he is out of eye-range. When he is gone, she begins to wander aimlessly about the house; feeling a repugnance too strong to be contested toward the sitting-room which was the scene of her yesterday's interview; toward sitting in the chair out of which she rose to wave Burnet with fatuous insolence to the door; toward being mutely reproached by the stand of pot-plants, of whose origin she now no longer entertains the slightest doubt.

She ends her restless migrations by straying into the library, that is still swaddled and shrouded from head to heel. She strays from the bookcase on whose ladder she has so often of late stood cramped in discomfort, snatchily reading, to the window through which she has idly watched the splashy washing of so many broughams and landaus.

At each spot, the thought that occupied her when last she stood there comes potently back to her. She is dismally

chewing the cud of sour reflection; relentlessly passing in review the unreason, obstinate uncharity, and signal falsity of her own judgments, when the door, as on so many previous occasions, opens. She starts, fully expecting for the moment to see once again the apparition of the nurse's clean cap and white apron; but no! the nurse has gone to smooth some other pillow, and to lighten the weary hours of her new invalid, with anecdotes of the eccentricity and ill humor of the old one.

"I regret extremely to be obliged to force myself upon you once again," says Burnet, entering and bowing with cold formality. "Believe me, I would have avoided it if I could, but I am compelled by circumstances to speak to you."

"Are you?" she says, almost inaudibly, stammering and trembling, for she is taken quite off her guard; then, with a prodigious effort, trying to pull herself together, "Pray come in! won't you—won't you sit down?"

This is, perhaps, under the circumstances, almost an empty compliment, as none of the chairs are in a position to be sat upon. Most are standing acrobatically on their heads, and all have brown-holland night-gowns on; but the intention is good.

"Thank you, no," he replies, gravely, though an almost invisible smile flashes for a second into his eyes, as, glancing round, he realizes the hollowness of the invitation.

There is a moment's pause. He has shut the door, and is standing opposite to her, exactly opposite, where he can minutely watch every agonized fluctuation of her complexion; every tremor of the heavy white eyelids that droop over her eyes.

"I need not, I suppose, remind you," he says, in a low but steady voice, "of the subject of the conversation that passed between us yesterday?"

Her sole answer is to writhe. With an unavoidable movement of shame, she raises both hands toward her face; then,

mastering herself with a great effort, lowers them again. She can not go through all her life with her hands before her face.

"You need not be alarmed!" he says, hastily, observing, and perhaps—who knows?—compassionating these symptoms. "I will not recur to it more than is unavoidable, but I am compelled again to allude to Mr. Latimer's will, I presume that you know that he has appointed me your guardian?"

"And you refuse to act?" she cries, precipitately, in an uneven voice, breaking in upon his sentence; "of course, that is understood. I know that that is what you are going to say!"

"Do you, indeed?" he replies, quietly, with a very slight lifting of his straight eyebrows; "then you know more than I know myself."

She has lifted her eyes, and, astonishment for the moment getting the better of shame, is staring hard and full at him.

"I do not refuse to act," he continues, firmly, returning her full glance with one as direct; "it would be useless to deny that it would be pleasanter to do so. Our intercourse," with a slight and quickly suppressed flash of resentment, "has not been so agreeable that we are either of us likely to wish to prolong it. If we followed our inclinations, there is no doubt that we should never be brought into contact with each other again; but, as perhaps you may have already learned, we can not always follow our inclinations in this world."

Having given vent rather dryly to this truism, he pauses a moment, either to take breath, or expecting some comment.

"No, one can not," she says, meekly and faltering.

"A promise is a promise," he resumes, taking up his parable again with another truism. "Long ago, long before—I need hardly say—I had any personal acquaintance with you"—pronouncing these words very distinctly, whereat she shivers a little, and droops her head again—"being led by your father erroneously to imagine that you would be left without any near relative or natural protector—"

"He never counted Uncle Marlowe," she murmurs; "he always hated him."

"I promised that in case of his death I would look after your interests."

"My interests!" she repeats, with bitterness; "he was quite indifferent to them; he was only anxious to slight Uncle Marlowe."

"Possibly. But though I now see that I promised under an entire misapprehension of the facts of the case"—with considerable emphasis—"yet none the less do I look upon my promise as still binding. I do not refuse; I accept the responsibility entailed upon me."

At each clause of his speech she seems to herself to step one rung further down the ladder of humiliation.

"Is it possible?" she says faintly. "I—I could not have believed it. I—I thank you very much."

"Do not," he says harshly, with a forbidding gesture, waving off her acknowledgments; "you owe me no thanks, and I have no wish to take what does not belong to me. Pray allow me to finish what I have to say to you."

She shrinks back into herself, snubbed and silent, and he proceeds:

"Under the mistaken idea that I have explained to you of your lonely and uncared-for condition, I promised your father that, in case of his dying during your minority, I would take you to live with me—in my house—until you came of age."

As he speaks and the meaning of his sentence reaches her brain, an instantaneous overmastering flood of red pours over her face and throat.

"To live with—to live in your house!" she echoes, stammering.

He looks away; dislike her as he may and undoubtedly does, he is merciful enough to pretend not to observe that agony of confusion.

"I must hasten to explain," he says, hurriedly, "that I

have a sister—an old—an unmarried woman of a certain age, who lives with me and keeps my house." Then, quickly continuing: "When, during the course of the last month, I became personally acquainted with you, and with your real relations and position in life, I earnestly entreated Mr. Latimer to release me from my engagement; but such was the force of his prejudice against Mr. Marlowe that he utterly and violently refused to comply."

The scarlet ebbs gradually away from cheek and forehead, and gives way to an expression of the blankest pale consternation.

"To—live in your house! after what has happened!" she says, gasping. "Oh, it is monstrous! It can not be!"

He shrugs his shoulders.

"It will not be for long; I imagine"—with a cursory, careless glance at her ripe, June beauty—"that your age is not very far short of twenty-one."

"I shall not be twenty-one till the first of August," she replies, with a tearful droop of the corners of her mouth; "that is five whole months off."

A slight shade of disappointment clouds his eyes.

"Five months!" he repeats. "I had certainly thought of a shorter time; but, after all," with recovered equanimity, "even five months are soon over."

"I tell you it is out of the question!" she cries, in great and distressing agitation; "it is a sheer impossibility, after what has passed."

Again he shrugs.

"We had better turn our backs as much as we can on the past," he answers, steadily; "otherwise, I agree with you, the thing is a sheer impossibility."

"Will you show me how to turn my back upon it?" she cries, with an accent of almost scorn. "Do you find it so easy—I say, do you find it so easy to forget?"

"I said nothing about forgetting," he answers, dryly; "only children and fools forget."

There is a dreary silence. Gillian is forcing herself to face this incredible future, these five hideous months of hourly companionship with the man whom she has so grossly, clumsily wronged; the life of a kitten with the bird she has killed tied round her neck.

"No," he continues presently, in a reflective yet matter-of-fact tone, "we will say nothing about forgetting; that is beyond the scope of our will. But let us, without more talking, do what is well within it, which is to accept the inevitable, and behave to each other, during the period of our forced companionship, with decent humanity and civility; that ought not to be so difficult."

He looks at her half inquiringly, as if expecting an answer; but she is not in a condition to frame any, whether of assent or negation.

"At the end of the five months," he pursues, straightening himself, and drawing rather a long breath of relief at the prospect, "we shall again be free; it will then lie only with ourselves to decide whether we shall ever come in contact again in the course of our lives."

There is something in his tone intangible, indescribable, yet to her ear perfectly intelligible, which leaves small doubt in her mind as to what his own decision on that point will be.

"Five months!—twenty-five weeks!—a hundred and seventy-five days!" she ejaculates, going through a dismayed calculation. Again that sudden flashing smile is born and again instantly extinguished in his eyes.

"You must remember that they will come one at a time," he says, in a consoling voice; though, whether the consolation is addressed to himself or to her, even he is not very clear; "they will not come all at once. Happily, most ills can be borne when they come one at a time."

But this view of the subject fails to exhilarate his auditor.

The corners of her mouth are still turned lamentably down, and two salt, sullen tears are oozing through her drooped lashes. He tries another form of comfort.

"I think," he says, in a cold, civil, quiet voice, "that the inconveniences you apprehend may, perhaps, turn out to be fewer than you anticipate. It is the association with me that you naturally and unavoidably dread; but I think that on this point I may partially reassure you."

At the word "reassure," she lifts her gray eyes suddenly, and the two tears shaken off by this unexpected movement fall on the breast of her black gown and glitter there.

"I am a busy man," he continues, his dry cold glance meeting her disconsolate wet one; "there are very few moments of the day, unoccupied by my profession, spent by me at home. It is true that I return to dinner, but I often dine out, and as often as not—probably now oftener than not—I pass the evenings in my own room. Our intercourse, therefore, our conversation, excepting what regards your own affairs, may be reduced to a minimum. I think I can promise you this."

Her moist look falls again to the carpet; her lips twitch.

"Thank you," she says, in a small voice that neither Jane, Emilia, nor Dick, nor any of the Marlowe servants would credit to be hers, did they hear it.

"You will be free to come and go as you choose," he continues, still speaking in that rather harsh and schoolmasterly tone, "to visit and be visited by the society you yourself please to select; the control I exercise over you will probably be purely nominal. I think"—pausing a moment, and passing his hand over his forehead in careful reflection—"I think that that is all that is needful to be said on the subject at present. I think I need not trespass on your time further this morning."

He walks to the door, but reaching it, stops, and turning, again approaches her:

"There is one thing I had, perhaps, better add," he says, in

a tone rather less compassed than his former one, and through which pierces an emotion of some kind, "I shall be glad if, during your stay in my house, you could be moderately polite to my sister."

She looks back at him for a moment, white and aghast; then breaking out into sudden speech:

"What!" she cries, passionately, "do you think I am always—do you think I can never—"

She stops short, struck dumb by her own conscience. What reason, indeed, has he to credit her with the least portion of this lowly but amiable Christian grace?

PART II.—SECOND THOUGHTS.

CHAPTER I.

For the second time within two months, Miss Latimer has violently kicked and pushed against her destiny, and that iron destiny has quietly repelled her puny attacks, and left her baffled, bruised and worsted. Twice she has hotly clamored that "it can not be!" and lo! twice she comes to learn that it can be; not only that it can be, but "that it is."

Another fortnight has gone; a tiresome, hurried, unrestful fortnight of business and business arrangements; of taking inventories—for the house in —— Square is to be let, furnished—of making up dozens of wine-glasses, and repairing breaches in the ranks of egg-cups and pie-dishes for the incoming tenants.

To day all is ended. Squire Marlowe, with his hair more erect than ever on his head, and wrapped in an ulster, in which he looks like a short, tearful bear, has gone away sobbing in a hansom, with his portmanteau on the top, to Euston Square: and Gillian, crying too, but less noisily, is left behind, to front the perils of her new life; to face the five months, the twenty-five weeks, the one hundred and seventy-five days. The sole provision she has made against them is a large almanac, which she has purchased with the intention of hanging it up over against her bed, and passing a pen-stroke through each purgatorial day as it rolls into the past, and so brings her nearer by twenty-four hours to the moment of her deliverance. It has been agreed that she is to make her appearance toward luncheon-time in —— Street. Since the conversation related

in the last chapter, she has held no communication, save on business, with her guardian except for five minutes two days ago, when he came hastily in to make final arrangements as to the exact date of her arrival at his house. The necessary sentences have been exchanged with stiff civility. He is about to leave her, when, to his surprise, she nervously detains him.

"I—I wish to ask," she says, stammering—"it is best to know—does your sister—does Miss Burnet begin with any prejudice against me? Have you—have you—told her anything?"

He answers her curtly, "Nothing," and so goes.

Despite this assurance, Gillian's heart beats low and her nerves tingle, as, at five minutes to one in the afternoon, her four-wheeler, with herself, her maid—for she now again has a maid—and her boxes, draws up with all the shabby, dragging humility of its kind at the house indicated, and, in one moment, she is standing inside its commonplace portals. Even to a meeting with one who is personally unknown to us, we mostly go with some preconceived notions or preparatory information; but, concerning Miss Burnet, Gillian has neither. Her sole knowledge of her is derived from her brother's laconic statement that she is "a single woman of a certain age;" which condemnatory phrase, though it shuts the door upon youth, beauty, and sentiment, yet leaves a large margin in the matter of character, and even of externals, for the imagination to play upon.

"A single woman of a certain age!" repeats Gillian to herself, involuntarily, as she follows her own name into a good-sized room, and finds the lady who answers to this description advancing to meet her.

An elderly figure, disguised by an enveloping woolen shawl, has slowly risen from a chair, and is holding out a formal hand to her; but, as no words accompany this dumb greeting, she herself speaks:

"I hope," she says, summoning to her aid that courteous ease and self-possession which, as she flatters herself and as many people have told her, six years of welcoming and entertaining good and various company have given her, "I hope that I am in good time. I hope that I have not kept you waiting."

"We should not have waited," replies the other, ungraciously; "professional men can not wait. As it happens, however," she adds, after an instant's pause, "John is still engaged seeing patients."

Even as she speaks, there is the sound of a sharp, decided footstep on the stairs; the door opens, and Burnet enters. It would be natural, perhaps, that a host on first welcoming a guest beneath his roof should offer her his hand. But this does not happen in the present case. He contents himself with a grave bow. It flashes across Gillian that he and she have never shaken hands. Apparently they are not going to begin now.

"You have met already to-day, it seems," says Miss Burnet, with a sharp glance from one to the other, and drawing the natural inference from their mode of salutation. Then, as nobody answers her, "At all events," she goes on, smiling dryly, "I may save myself the trouble of introducing you to each other; you are fast friends already, I presume."

Burnet has seized the smart, bright poker, and is raking out with noisy fury the lowest bar of the grate. Gillian crimsons. But, apparently, the single woman of a certain age is not a person of very nice perceptions, for she continues, her keen look still travelling from one to the other of the suddenly reddened faces before her, "There is nothing that conduces so much to intimacy as perpetually meeting in a sick-room, is there?"

"What has become of luncheon?" cries Burnet, dropping his poker with some clamor, and breaking into her sentence with hasty brusqueness; "what are they thinking about?"

At that moment it is announced, to the poignant relief of two out of the three persons present, and they all go down It is a very good luncheon, solid, various, temptingly spread, and Gillian had thought herself hungry; but it seems that the *gêne* of her position has destroyed even her healthy country appetite. How can she eat his *quenelles* and cutlets, delicate and appetizingly dressed as they confessedly are? At each mouthful she swallows, one of the many insults she has heaped upon him rises up in judgment and chokes her.

"There is nothing that you can fancy, it seems," says Miss Burnet, with a rather displeased glance at her neglected dainties. "However, I am really not to blame; I consulted John as to your likes and dislikes, but he professed himself quite ignorant of them," with the same look of grim penetration.

Gillian would have liked to leave this sentence quite without answer, but, as some response is clearly expected of her, she speaks with effort:

"It is quite true—we have never—it has never happened that Dr. Burnet and I have broken bread together before."

She does not, as would seem natural, look with friendly appeal for confirmation at the end of this sentence to him of whom it treats. On the contrary, her eyes drop to her plate and again that dreaded silence seems about to resume its sway. It is Burnet himself who makes the next spasmodic effort to vanquish it.

"Mr. Marlowe left you this morning, I suppose?" he says in a formal, matter-of-fact voice, and not glancing at her as he speaks.

"Yes, at 10.30," she answers, not looking at him either.

"At what hour did he expect to reach home?"

"Not until near dinner-time; it is a tedious journey."

At once it flashes over both their memories in whose company each had last taken that tedious journey; and the recollection dries up in an instant the scanty runlet of their flat

talk. When they had been vituperating each other, they had been so fluent—never at a loss for a word; but, now that civility and little cheap courtesies are all that is asked of them, they are unable to find a syllable.

"I appear," says Miss Burnet, dryly, looking up from her plate—"I appear to be a check upon your conversation; no doubt you have much to talk about that is not meant for a third pair of ears. Luncheon is with me such a mere matter of form that it is only for the sake of sociability that I ever sit down to it. To tell you the truth, I shall be only too glad of an excuse to—"

"Oh, pray do not go!" says Gillian, interrupting with eager haste, and stretching out a frightened white hand in detention toward her hostess.

"For Heaven's sake, stay where you are!" cries Burnet, peremptorily. A moment later, looking rather ashamed of his own vehemence, he adds, confusedly: "It is time for me to be off myself; I must be going."

"It is not half-past yet," says his sister, sharply; "you never go till half-past! Why are you in such a wonderful hurry to-day?"

He reseats himself, looking rather sheepish. By and by Miss Burnet rises, and in so doing lets her shawl drop from about her on the floor. In an instant he has hastened to pick it up.

"Pray do not trouble yourself," she says, crabbedly; "I have had to pick up my own pocket-handkerchief for too many years to be able to get into the way of having it done for me now."

His only answer is to fold her extensive muffler round her, with patient good humor, and send her up stairs, bidding her beware of the draughts for her cold. Gillian follows her. Arrived in the drawing-room:

"I suppose," says the elder woman, letting her eyes stray in leisurely investigation over the younger, "that you would lik

to see your rooms. Under the circumstances, I am sure that you will not expect me to show them to you. After all, you can not go wrong—the second door on the first landing on the right hand. As I understand that you are to make some stay with us, it would be absurd that you should be on the footing of a two days' guest."

Gillian colors.

"I am sorry," she says, in a voice of oppressed offense, "that I am obliged to intrude upon you."

"We shall not interfere," replies the other, apparently unaware of her guest's emotion, and looking suspiciously round, as she speaks, at the windows in search of draughts. "I go my way; you go yours."

It is true that to lose yourself in an average London house is no easy feat; and Gillian, following the directions so cavalierly imparted, finds herself presently in a large and airy bedroom—a bedroom French-bedded, cheval-glassed, amply wardrobed; and, passing out of it, discovers another smaller room, arranged—and evidently freshly and carefully arranged—as a boudoir.

"Come, her bark is worse than her bite!" says the girl, gayly; "she has treated me better than she has herself. There were no flowers in the drawing-room, only an India-rubber plant"—bringing, as she speaks, both nose and velvet check into loving contact with the great white bells of an odorous hyacinth.

But was it Miss Burnet? A recollection of the former pot-plants, of whose origin she had never dared to inquire, rises suddenly in judgment before her; and, catching a hasty glimpse of her own flushing face in a mirror opposite, she turns hastily to the window, feeling as if her own reflection were some one else—some one to note and mock at her guilty blush. By and by she continues her explorations. Fires burn cheerfully in both rooms, and her maid is already busily unpacking. She takes out the almanac, and hangs it up exactly opposite her

bed-foot, so that it may be the first object on which her waking eyes fall; then she arranges her books; then she writes to the Squire, and tries, conscientiously, if not quite successfully—and, after all, who can expect to be perfectly successful in a first attempt?—to refrain from giving him advice. She had thought that she had kept careful watch over each several sentence; and yet, on reading it over, she can not deny that the whole has a slightly hortatory air. However, it is too much trouble to re-write it, so it goes.

. . . . . .

It is evening. Dinner is over. To say that it has been enjoyed would be an over-statement; since, though there is some excitement, yet there is certainly not much positive pleasure in social converse, which it requires a continued vigilance to keep from falling into quagmires of confusion, or pitfalls of awkward silence. However, it is now over, and Gillian, seated in a safe if not very amusing *téte-à-téte* with her hostess over the drawing-room fire, begins to breathe and cool again. She has fallen into a sort of reverie; her eyes, with faint displeasure, taking in the details of the unlovely, stiff room, into which an upholsterer has apparently been turned, to work unchecked his tasteless will, when a sudden interrogation, fired point-blank at her—an interrogation to which she is totally unable to give a satisfactory answer—rouses her with a start:

"What has become of John?"

"I—I—do not know," answers the girl, confused; "does he usually sit with you in the evenings?"

"Always when he is at home; I make a point of it. Will you ring the bell, please?"

Gillian complies; and when the servant answers it,

"Tell Dr. Burnet to come up at once," says his sister, commandingly.

In a few minutes the man returns.

"Dr. Burnet says that he hopes you will be so good as to excuse him to-night, 'm; he is busy."

"Busy! Fiddlesticks!" exclaims she, brusquely; "what is he busy about?"

"He did not say, 'm; he only said he was busy."

"Humph!"

By and by tea is brought in, and Miss Burnet returns to her charge.

"Tell Dr. Burnet that tea is ready."

In two minutes the Butler reappears.

"Dr. Burnet would be very much obliged, 'm, if you would send him down a cup of tea; he can not come up to-night."

"Can not come up?" very sharply; "why can not he come up? Go and ask him why!"

Ruthless as to his legs, and forgetting to count the number of journeys up and down the endless London stairs, on which she is sending him, she again dispatches her messenger, but with no better success.

"Dr. Burnet says he can not come up to-night, 'm. He would be obliged if you would send him his tea."

There is something apparently in the shape of the sentence which tells Miss Burnet that she is worsted, and must sit down under her defeat, for she says no more; but, after pouring out a cup of tea, and throwing in lumps of sugar with a defiant and protesting air, returns to her chair, and after ruminating in silence for about five minutes—

"One would think," she says, slowly, and fixing a shrewd look upon her *vis-à-vis*, on whose face the late exchange of messages has left plain traces of uneasiness and discomfiture—"one would think *you* had frightened him away."

CHAPTER II.

During the hours of the long night, when everything else is idle, the snow, at least, is busy; and Gillian, hastening down in a shivering hurry to an eight o'clock breakfast, finds street

and house-tops coldly swathed in white. Dr. Burnet and his sister are already seated, and engaged in lively dialogue, *à propos*, as Miss Latimer presently discovers, of the snow that has to be shoveled from the roof.

"I should really advise you to employ the regular men," Burnet is saying, in a tone of temperate and deferential suggestion.

"I have already sent for old Joe," replies his sister, decisively.

"If you remember"—a slight smile curling his grave mouth —"last time he arrived so exceedingly drunk as to be perfectly incapable."

"I remember, poor old fellow, that his enemies chose to say so," retorts she, witheringly.

"I think, Hannah," with gentle insistance, "if I could persuade you—"

"You will never persuade me to turn my back upon an old friend in adversity," she answers, grandiosely; pray say no more about it. I have sent for old Joe."

He shrugs his shoulders with a gesture of resignation, and the subject drops.

About an hour later, as Gillian is standing by the drawing-room window, reading a note which has just been put into her hand, the sound of a tremendous crash echoes through the house. For a moment both women stand stunned by the noise; then:

"As sure as possible," cries Miss Burnet, in a horror-struck voice, "it is old Joe, who has fallen from the roof!"

In an instant she is rushing down stairs, and Gillian, in high excitement, at her heels. Arrived on the ground-floor, they find the whole strength of the establishment gathered in a glass-roofed passage, which leads to the Doctor's bath-room, the chief part of which roof now lies, thanks to the exertions of Miss Burnet's *protégé*, in sharp, bright shivers on the floor, he having, apparently in a moment of exhilaration, flung a great

weight of snow on the top of it, and playfully pitched his shovel after.

"He is not hurt, is he, poor old fellow?" cries Miss Burnet, in a breathless voice, looking round with scared anxiety from one of the gathered faces to another.

"Heaven be praised, he is quite intact!" replies her brother, dryly. "I wish I could say as much for my poor roof."

This is all the reproach that he makes her. He is turning away to his morning's work, when he casually encounters Gillian's glance—a glance bright and soft with compassion for his misfortunes and admiration of his patience—involuntarily fastened upon him.

For the first time in their lives their souls meet and salute each other in a friendly laugh. For one second the curtain of awkwardness and embarrassment between them is drawn up; to be let down, however, at once again.

"I wished to speak to you," says the girl, dropping her eyes to the broken glass which the servants are beginning gingerly to sweep up. "I have had an invitation," glancing at the note in her hand, "to luncheon for to-day from some people I know—the Tarltons. I think—if you remember, you saw them that day—at Marlowe."

"To be sure, to be sure!" he replies, hastily shying away, as is usual with them both, from any allusion to their first meeting; then lapsing into the tone of formal and constrained politeness which he always employs toward her—"of course, of course. Pray accept; I am delighted!"

Even as he speaks he is gone. She had wished for a ready assent to her proposition, but, now that she has got it, she is not altogether pleased with the accent of genuine relief and pleasure which she hears or imagines in the tone with which it is given.

"He might have disguised a little better his joy at being rid of me for half an hour," she says to herself, somewhat bitterly,

as she begins to climb the stairs a good deal more deliberately than, five minutes ago, she came down them.

The Tarltons are still sojourning at Garland's Hotel; and thither, at the hour appointed, Miss Latimer repairs. She is shown into a large first-floor sitting-room; and, as her name is announced, the figure of a woman, who has apparently had no livelier occupation than to be staring out at the quiet *cul-de-sac* made by the hotel at the end of Suffold Street, turns quickly toward her; a woman's voice utters an exclamation of pleasure.

"So you have come, have you? We all thought it was very doubtful if your jailer would let you out of his clutches."

"My jailer!" repeats Gillian, in a bewildered voice, forgetting to respond to her friend's effusive greeting; "what jailer—what are you talking about?"

"*What jailer—what am I talking about?*" replies the other, laughing and mimicking her; "have you so many, then? Why, your guardian, to be sure!"—with a sarcastic accent—"the scheming medical adventurer you told me about, when I came to see you in —— Square."

"I told you about?" echoes Gillian, stupidly.

"Yes, *you*, to be sure! who else? Why, you said, or rather hinted, *pis que pendre* of him! Is it possible that you forget?"

"You exaggerate!" cries Gillian, passionately, shaking off the hand that holds her, as if it had been a viper—"you exaggerate unjustifiably! I could not, I never did; I wish my tongue had been cut out before I—"

She breaks off, choked and stammering.

"It is evident that I am on a wrong tack," says Sophia, shrewdly. "I suppose," with a touch of irony, "that my ears must have deceived me! Come, we will change the subject."

Gillian makes a gesture of eager acquiescence; then:

"Where is Anne?" she asks, hastily.

"She is in the back room," replies Sophia. "We find that

it conduces more to family harmony that we should each occupy a separate sitting-room."

"Yes?"

"She is showing our cousin, Harry Fielding, how to make the hangman's knot," pursues Sophia, with a shrug. "You know Anne always begins with the hangman's knot."

At this point the folding-doors that lead into the next room open, and Anne's yellow head appears in the aperture.

"Gillian!" she cries, with an accent of pleasure; "I had no idea that you had come." Then turning angrily to her sister, "Why was not I told that Gillian was here?"

"We thought it a pity to disturb you," replies Sophia, spitefully.

"So you have escaped from your ogre!" cries the younger girl, ignoring her sister's gibe, and affectionately clasping both Gillian's hands; "how did you manage it? I suppose that you stole off on tiptoe, without letting him know. What are you making faces about, Sophia?"

The entry of Mrs. Tarlton and the almost simultaneous announcement of luncheon happily render explanation for the moment unnecessary.

Presently they are all sitting round the table. Gillian is placed beside her hostess, who, as soon as they are seated, gives her young guest's nearest hand an affectionate squeeze, saying, confidentially:

"You must tell us all about it by and by. Sophia gave us a shocking idea of him from your account. What a designing wretch he must be!"

Gillian gives a sort of gasp, and looks forlornly round the table in search of aid. She feels as if it were blackest treachery not to speak, and yet her tongue cleaves to the roof of her mouth.

The General unintentionally comes to her aid. The General, who has hitherto been sitting in that grumpy silence that a

well bred man can permit himself only in the bosom of his own family.

"Anne, will you be so good as to tell your mother that these cutlets are absolutely raw?"

Anne wisely refrains from delivering this message, or its answer, promptly given.

"Will you explain to your father, Anne, that I am not in the habit of cooking the luncheon, and therefore can not be responsible for it?"

One would imagine that such an exchange of amenities between the heads of the house would throw a gloom over the rest of the company. But such is not the case. Use is everything; and, since the time when they were first able to lisp, the Misses Tarlton have been in the habit of matter-of-factly transmitting their parents' challenges. The conversation flows on as smoothly as if no such sharpshooting had taken place.

"May one come and see you?" asks Sophia, inquisitively, surveying with a rather puzzled air the uncomfortable, but beautiful, hot red roses in her friend's cheeks. "Are you allowed to receive visitors? I am devoured with curiosity to see your *intérieur*."

"Nothing is easier," replies Gillian, constrainedly; "I have a sitting-room of my own, in which I shall be happy to receive you."

Miss Tarlton looks disappointed.

"That is not quite what I meant; I want to see *him*. What is the best moment for catching a glimpse of him? is he generally at home at luncheon?"

"I believe—sometimes!" very reluctantly.

"Why do you want to see him?" cries Mrs. Tarlton, in indignant partisanship, again making a sympathetic clutch at Gillian's most reluctant hand. "For my part I would not sit at the same table with such a rogue!"

Again that gasping effort to speak; again that choking inability. She can only mutely tear her hand away, as she has

already done from Sophia. If they do not understand this dumb protest, she can make no other. By and by they finish luncheon; but not before Gillian has had to undergo the condolences and martial ire of the General, who, being rather deaf, has not heard any of the previous dialogue, and, therefore, reopens the whole subject *ab ovo*, expressing his opinion of Burnet's past, and his hopes for his future, in very nervous Saxon. In fact, the sympathy of her friends is so overpowering to Miss Latimer that immediately on leaving the dining-room she asks for her brougham, and, when it comes, hastily hurries into it. Sophia accompanies her to the door for a few last words.

"I am quite serious," she says, with her hand on the panel; "you may expect me in a day or two; I always like to judge for myself. You lunch at two, I suppose? Good-by."

All the way home Gillian lies back in the cushions, dissolved in bitter tears of repentance and remorse over her own dastardliness. Her only ray of consolation lies in the fact that she has left Sophia in the mistaken belief that the Burnet family lunches at two.

* * * * * * *

"If you please, 'm, Dr. Burnet is very sorry, but he is busy again to-night; and he would be much obliged if you would send him down his tea."

The cups stand arow; the bright kettle hisses lustily, seated on the spirit lamp; the curtains are drawn, and the garish carpet and the expensive chairs have their uglinesses glossed over and explained away by the amiable red firelight. The parrot, who has been sedulously screeching most of the afternoon, is silent in sleep; so is the prosperous tom-cat; so, apparently, is Miss Burnet. At least, so she was; for she certainly is not now.

"Again!" she says, in an extremely wakeful voice, rising

out of her influenza and wraps, and sitting up, erect and awful; "this is unaccountable! Go and tell Dr. Burnet that I must beg he will come up stairs."

The man vanishes, and his mistress and Gillian remain silently listening, watchful and attentive for the result of his mission. Apparently, however, there is none. He does not return, nor does Burnet appear—in fact, nothing happens. After ten minutes has passed:

"Would you be so good as to ring the bell?" says the elder woman.

The bell is within reach of her own hand, and at a considerable distance from the girl; but this does not appear to occur to her, though it does to Gillian. When the servant answers it:

"Did you give my message?" asks Miss Burnet, severely.

"Yes, 'm."

"What did Dr. Burnet say?"

"He did not say anything, 'm."

"Humph!"

After a moment's pause, in a tone of alert suspicion:

"Has he ordered fresh tea to be made for himself?"

"No, 'm."

"Humph! that will do."

Again there is silence, though not now a watchful one, for nothing can any longer be expected to occur. Gillian takes up a book, and for half an hour neither speaks. It is the stranger who first breaks into the drowsy stillness:

"Dr. Burnet has had no tea," she says, with a tinge of indignation in her fresh voice.

"It will not kill him to go without," replies his sister, brutally; and, having by this time finished her own cup in leisurely sips, and, as a matter of course, requested Gillian to rise and deposit it on the tea-table for her, she rearranges her muffler round her head, and disposes her whole person to deliberate slumber.

So sought, it is not long in being won. Of this fact Gillian is not long in becoming aware, by the cessation of a sniff, to which most of Miss Burnet's waking moments are in thrall—a sniff, not of temper or pride, but simply of habit, and which is to her an occupation. It is a loud sniff, and occurs with the regularity of a clock's tick. However, it is stilled now; and Gillian, since there is no longer any one to be taken in by the farce of her reading, lays down her book.

From the selfish, elderly figure, slumberously stretched in the full fire-warmth, to the still hissing kettle—from the kettle back to the elderly figure, her glance wanders uncertainly.

At length, "It must not be!" she says articulately, though under her breath; "it is monstrous that I should come between him and the necessaries of life."

As she so speaks, with tragic exaggeration, she rises, and, her gown being of a soft, clinging stuff that makes no noise in moving, she walks toward the door; and opening it cautiously, and shutting it still more cautiously behind her, she finds herself on the landing. Gillian has embraced a great resolution. She knows that, if it is not carried out in this very moment of its conception, it never will be. So she runs with quick, light feet down stairs; and, finding her way a little uncertainly about the still unknown house, knocks at a door, which has been pointed out to her as that of the doctor's study and consulting-room. Her light knock is instantly answered by a prompt "Come in!" But her treacherous courage is already off at full gallop; and the very sound of that voice which gives her permission to enter deprives her of the power to avail herself of that permission. She stands vacillating, reddening, trembling under the gaslight, with more than half a mind to flee even now, and leave that knock for ever unaccounted for. But it is too late. The door has opened from the inside, and the master of the house stands expectant before her.

"What is it?" he says; then, with a sudden change from

his every-day business tone to one of exceeding, unbelieving surprise, "Miss Latimer!"

The astonishment of the key in which he speaks makes her feel hotly the irregularity of her own impulsive action, and deprives her for the moment of the power of speech.

"Pray come in; pray sit down," he says, with a gesture of civil invitation, while his voice tries to exchange its inflection of startled inquiry for that one of colorless politeness which he seems to keep and bring out for her sole use.

"Thank you, no," she answers, still hovering uneasily on the threshold. "I shall not detain you a minute."

But, as even now she does not at once explain why she is detaining him at all, he tries to help her.

"Can I be of any use to you?" he asks, civilly. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

She *must* answer, and so she feels.

"You—you have had no tea," she says, hesitatingly, while her gray eyes stray over his shoulder into the interior of the room beyond—the room whose walls have heard so many sick voices tell their painful tales—stray over the substantial writing-table, the cheerful fire, the open books that tell of peaceable study.

"Have I not?" he says, carelessly, the suprise coming back unavoidably with a rush at this most unexpected proof of her solicitude for his comfort. "No, by the bye, I have not; but it is not of the least consequence."

His sincere indifference on the subject and his still expectant attitude, as if she must have something else to say, make her feel more acutely than before the foolish officiousness of her own mission, and again she is awkwardly dumb.

"I am afraid that I see how it is," he says, a look of enlightenment, and at the same time annoyance, flashing across his face. "It is my sister's doing. You must really not allow her to trespass on your good nature, and send you on her errands."

"You are mistaken," she cries, hastily; "Miss Burnet is asleep. I came of my own accord."

"Indeed!"

Still with that same civil air of awaiting an explanation.

"I came to say," looking nervously away from him, "that I do not mean—that I do not wish—that I have no desire to deprive you of the common comforts of life."

Perhaps it is the gas-light, which a sudden draught makes flicker, that gives the impression as if a quick ray of humor lit up into laughter his serious eyes.

"But I assure you that you do nothing of the kind."

"It is impossible—you will understand that it can not be—that the idea is insupportable to me," she says, struggling to regain her self-possession, and to speak with coherence and dignity, "that I should be the means of excluding you from—of robbing you of the use of—your own drawing-room."

"It is no privation; I am very happy here."

There is a ring of such unaffected truth in his voice; and his room, as she snatchily catches glimpses of it over his shoulder, looks so much less heavily gaudy and dully pompous than the drawing-room, that she must fain accept the humiliating conviction that he is quite sincere.

"I understood," she says, in a mortified tone—"I was told—that hitherto—previous to my arrival—you always spent your evenings upstairs."

He shrugs slightly.

"Simply because my sister likes a companion, and in you she now has one."

There is a moment's silence.

"At all events," says Gillian, speaking with an effort, and making an attempt to recover something of her old habitual tone of superior commanding good sense—"at all events, it is best to be on the safe side. In order to simplify matters, I shall for the future spend my evenings in my own room—the

sitting-room that you have been so good as to place at my disposal."

As she draws up her long neck at the end of this stately sentence, she looks for a moment almost like the lofty Gillian who had curtly asked him his business on that snowy morning at Marlowe.

"I must beg you will do nothing so absurd!" he answers, tartly, declining suddenly from his formal courtesy into brusque ill humor; then, before she is ready with a rejoinder, he goes on, throwing a short, vexed look at her, and then turning his eyes away: "Why do you insist on our reopening the old subject? Was not it agreed upon between us—was not it definitively settled before you came here, that, in order to make our impossible position as little difficult as might be, we would sedulously avoid all opportunities of being brought into unnecessary contact? Why, in Heaven's name, before two days are over, should we try to upset an arrangement which is the only one that, under the circumstances, common sense could possibly dictate?"

She shakes her head, a little obstinately, unconvinced; and, regaining her self-possession in proportion as he loses his, she says, gently, but resolutely:

"It is illogical that, because a person has done you one injury, she should be compelled to do you another. Because my society has been unhappily forced upon you by circumstances, must I be obliged to feel that I am disturbing the current of your daily life, upsetting [illegible] that have probably been those of years?"

It is always difficult to her to [illegible]; but, as she finishes, she lifts the fair stars of her eyes as modestly as persuasively to his.

"They are nothing of the kind!" he answers, snappishly; "you are laboring under an [illegible] delusion. Let me repeat to you what I said [illegible] *here*."

There is so much emphasis and, at the same time, temper in his manner of pronouncing these last words, that she must needs see that her cause is lost, and that further argument would be only lowering her own dignity without getting any nearer to her goal. So she bows her head, a little crestfallenly, and says, formally:

"Then I must only apologize for having uselessly detained you."

She turns and flits away from him. As she passes up the stairs:

"He would have been a good friend," she says, sighing, "but he is an inveterate enemy."

She finds the drawing-room in exactly the same state as when she left it—the kettle still hissing, and cat, parrot and lady still warmly wrapped in sleep. It is a cold night, and her unsuccessful trip has perhaps chilled her body as well as her spirit; so she kneels down on the rug by the side of the fire, and rests her forehead dispiritedly against the mottled marble of the florid chimney-piece. She does not stir or change her position, even when after a while the door is heard to open. Of course, it is the butler come to take away the tea-things. It is not till she hears Miss Burnet's voice awake, and grimly triumphant, that she looks up.

"Oh! it is you, is it? I thought that, sooner or later, we should starve you out?"

"And you were right," replies a composed voice, that yet to a fine ear has a shade of consciousness in it.

"Do not let us have any such nonsense again!" rejoins she, brusquely, and so turns over on the other side, and resumes her scarcely interrupted slumber.

Gillian has lifted her dejected brow from its cold resting-place, and looks, pleasurably startled, over her own shoulder at the decorous figure, who is tranquilly drawing up a chair to the table, and arranging upon it the books that he has brought up under his arm. But no answering look gratifies her by

establishing a connection between her own officious visit and this unexpected advent.

After a few moments she rises noiselessly from her knees, and, taking up her neglected novel, establishes herself quietly not far from him, and within the radius of light thrown by the reading-lamp. He never looks up or moves an eyelid. It would have been easier to speak if she could have caught his eye; but, whether or not, she will do so.

"Thank you," she says, in a low voice, shy, yet conciliating. "I am grateful to you."

He does not respond, except by a formal movement of the head in stiff acknowledgment, nor has she again the courage to infringe upon so resolved a silence.

CHAPTER III.

THE February days, slowly lengthening as they go, march coldly on, and coldly and dully marches with them Gillian Latimer's life. Her deep mourning for the present forbids her carrying into and perhaps losing in society the long *ennui* that gnaws her. To be transplanted, without any intermediate stage of preparation or hardening off, from a life so full and bustling as to afford few and small breathing-times—a life in which she has been used to being pulled in a dozen directions at a time—to one of stagnant leisure, in which she is never pulled in any direction at all, would be a severe trial for a temper less commanding, a disposition less active than hers. It is not at once that she fully realizes that she is living in a house where no one asks her advice, or would take it did she offer it; where no servants look to her for orders; where she has no earthly business to exhort, admonish, or rebuke ...

living soul; where no special hour of any day calls for any special duty; where the wheels would run and the pulleys work quite as well and smoothly, were she to stay in bed all day. Of actual subject of complaint she has certainly none. Her own sitting-room, well lit, well warmed, luxurious, awaits whatever guests it may please her to receive. Her brougham stands always at her own orders; as to her comings and goings none inquire, nor does any one manifest the least curiosity about them. In justice to Miss Burnet it must be said that she feels none. "I go my way; you go yours!" she had said in the first hour of their acquaintance, and to this motto she rigorously keeps.

As to Burnet himself, if, in their compelled meetings—the silent breakfasts, the hasty luncheons, the short dinners—her relation toward him is altering, it is so imperceptibly that she herself is not aware of it. It is true that there are variations in his demeanor toward her, as in his temper, such as must always occur in the case of a sensitively organized, overworked man; little spurts of irritability, welcome if only as a change, varying the uniformity of his conscientious, chill politeness. Even the letters from home, to which she had looked as her mainstay and chief prop in her banishment, have ceased to afford her unmixed comfort. There is a depreciation in the tone of her uncle's, and a growing self-assertiveness in those of Jane, that causes her serious disquiet. Nor does the fact that this state of things is but transitional, that on the 1st of August her bands will be loosed, materially cheer her. Even the nightly putting a pen-stroke through one of the days that lie between her and her deliverance in the big almanac on her wall, does not very sensibly exhilirate her.

Ten days have passed since her visit to Suffolk Street, and every day, as the luncheon-hour has been safely tided over, she has drawn a long breath of relief at the non-appearance of the Tarltons. The fear of the fulfillment of Sophia's threat is daily growing fainter in her mind, when one morning, as she

is sitting in her own room, following with listless eyes the crawling cabs and furious butchers' carts in the streets, and reading with the slack attention of a person who is giving but a very small portion of herself into her author's hands, the door opens, and two furry figures fly in; two voices, confident of being welcome, break into voluble greetings; two cheeks freshened by the sharp wind lay themselves against hers; two neatly gloved right hands press hers in an effusive clasp.

"You must have given us up!" "You must have begun to despair of us!" cry they in a breath.

"No. I did not," replies Gillian, stifling a slight sigh, and abandoning herself a little passively to her friends' endearments. "I knew you would come."

"We should not be likely to desert you *now*, of all times," says the younger girl, affectionately stroking the satinly back of one of Gillian's hands, of which she has taken possession.

"It would be inhuman not to stand by you *now!*" says the elder, with a reassuring squeeze to the fingers of the other, which had fallen a helpless prey to her.

"What a pretty room!" cries Anne, jumping up, after her tenderness has been satisfied by a few minutes' fondling. "Your own taste, of course? From your description of him, one would hardly suspect it of being his"—with a laugh. "Is this your bedroom?" peeping inquisitively through the half-open door: "may I see that, too?"

"Anne would come," says Sophia, lowering her voice a little, as her sister's figure disappears into the interior; "I tried to dissuade her, but you know she never knows when she is *de trop*. What is that?" pricking up her ears, as the luncheon-bell rings quick and loud through the house.

"I think—I suppose—I believe—that it is luncheon!" answers Gillian, reluctantly.

"Impossible!" rejoins Sophia, taking out her watch, and looking at it; "it is only just one o'clock, and you certainly told me that you lunched at two."

"Did I? I—I think not; you—you must have misunderstood me."

"Then we must be going, I imagine," says Sophia, not, however, offering to move. "I suppose that you are not on such terms as to be able to ask us to stay luncheon?"

"Certainly not!" replies Gillian, hastily, but with eager decision; "I could not think of taking such a liberty."

"How hard! how very odd!" says Miss Tarlton, with a mortified look, beginning, with extreme slowness, to rearrange her veil, while Gillian fidgetily watches her.

While both are thus employed, there comes a knock at the door, followed by a servant's voice:

"If you please, 'm, Miss Burnet bids me say she hopes that you will be able to persuade the ladies to stay luncheon."

Sophia's countenance brightens, and she drops her veil.

"Will you stay?" asks Gillian, trying to make her tone as colorless as possible, and to keep out of it, as well she may, her own bias in the matter.

"Of course we will!" replies Sophia, staunchly; "it would be very odd if we could not do such a little thing as that for you."

Anne says nothing. She only makes another fond lunge at Gillian's hand, which, however, she this time succeeds in secreting among the folds of her black gown, and then all go down stairs. They find Miss Burnet, who never waits for anything or anybody, already seated, and eating. Miss Burnet would sit down to her luncheon at one o'clock were a conflagration raging, or an earthquake shocking in the very house, merely sending down peremptory orders to it by the butler to stop. But the host's place is vacant. A faint hope that he may be out, that some opportune sick person may have demanded his presence, flits through his ward's mind; and for a few moments she has the malicious pleasure of covetly watching Sophia's inquisitive eyes uneasily traveling toward the door.

But it is not for long that this gratification is destined to last. Before it has occurred to his sister to comment on his absence he is here among them, welcoming his guests with grave smile and courteous eyes, and holding out to them in gracious greeting that right hand that hers has never touched.

At his advent there is a moment's silence, during which Gillian can not lift her drooped eyes for very shame; so well does she know what, at least in the case of her two friends, is causing it. "Adventurer!" "Ogre!" "Rogue!" all the ugly names that, on her own showing, they have heaped upon him, march in unhandsome procession before her inner eye; and, as they do, she involuntarily glances remorsefully up at him, in order to pain herself by picturing the effect that, after such an introduction, the real man must be producing on unprejudiced minds and eyes.

"We have met before, I think, though, no doubt, you do not remember it," says Sophia, in her agreeable woman-of-the-world voice, that yet to Gillian's ear keeps a shade of the astonishment that for one moment had struck even her voluble tongue into dumbness.

For an instant he looks inquiringly at her; then, as a flash of recognition darts into his keen, bright eyes:

"I remember, perfectly," he answers. "You were sitting on the floor, spinning a large top; I think you were all spinning tops."

"Which we struggled convulsively to conceal, when you were announced," replies Sophia, laughing. "What a day it was! We heard afterward that in some places in the drifts the snow was six feet deep."

"It was rather bad," he says, shortly; then, as if in a hurry to give a more general character to the conversation, asks a trite question as to whether they as a rule have a good deal of snow in their part of the world. She answers "Yes" or "No" as the case may be; and then they drift easily off into a brisk and amiable duet, which lasts as long as luncheon.

Gillian seated on the other side of the table, and during most of the repast a victim to Anne's *sotto-voce* confidences, which run chiefly upon her parents' wars, her sister's ill nature, and her own flirtations, can not help lending more than half an ear to the other's dialogue. Its fluency makes her gasp. Her own conversations with her guardian are on both sides a series of feverish efforts to hinder the ball from dropping, to keep that silence, which is always threatening them, from supervening.

Here there is not a pause or a break in the flow of light yet not unintelligent talk: neither of them seems to have the least difficulty in looking into the other's face; several times they have laughed in mirthful concert. Sophia forgets to finish her jelly, and Burnet forgets that the clock has struck half past one, until austerely advised by his sister that he will be late at the hospital. Even then he lingers to hear the end of a sprightly anecdote, and finally departs with expressions of regret and a cordial hand-shake.

"Do not you hate Sophia when she is intelligent?" whispers Anne, stealing her hand into Gillian's arm as they leave the room. "*I* do; and one knows so well that it is all got up for the occasion."

Gillian's only answer is a somewhat lenient "Hush!"

"Anne, I can not have you monopolizing Gillian," cries Sophia, in a tone of elated affection, as they reach the privacy of Miss Latimer's sitting-room. "My dear child!"—throwing herself into a sofa-corner, and holding up both hands—"I am *dumb!* You must have been playing a practical joke upon us! Such a thorough gentleman!"

"Did I ever say he was not a gentleman?" cries Gillian, in passionate, scarlet hurry. "You put words into my mouth."

"I have never had any objection to professional men as such," continues Sophia, in a tone of dispassionate good sense; "They have always something interesting to tell one, and mostly know how to present their knowledge agreeably. For

my own part, I far prefer them to the empty headed *flaneurs* that one meets with tiresome iteration in our own walk of life."

"Come, I do not think that you need complain of them," says Anne, in a significant tone; "they do not trouble *you* much."

Sophia has far too much spirit not to retort suitably, and there follows a brisk passage of arms, during which, employing that nice accuracy in touching each other on the raw which a lifelong intimacy gives, neither girl fails to remind the other of incidents in her past history which she would perhaps have as soon had forgotten. At the end of their skirmish they resume their wraps, not at all the worse for it, and prepare to take leave.

"Now that the ice is broken," says Sophia, in cheerful farewell, "you will see me often. You heard that I was invited" —playfully—"well, I assure you that I mean to avail myself of the invitation."

"You will have her here again to-morrow and the day after," says Anne, in a whisper, lingering behind her sister as the latter turns to go; "she is so unused to a little attention that it quite upsets her."

CHAPTER IV.

More days pass, some foggy, some feebly shining, but none bringing with them much change in the complexion of Gillian's life. The clocks tick it monotonously away, and the almanac's erasures steadily grow.

Meanwhile, to neither of her housemates can she flatter herself that she is growing in the least degree essential, or even humbly useful. She has, indeed, faithful to the traditions of her past, made several sincere attempts to minister to, and at the same time improve, Miss Burnet; but her efforts have been rebutted by the unsparing directness with which that lady apparently simplifies her course through life.

"You are very good," she says, dryly; "but to tell you the honest truth, I am not very fond of having any one fussing after me."

Neither, it seems, does Miss Burnet's brother want her to be fussing after him; but at that, to do her justice, she makes no attempt. It is true that he has ceased to struggle with Fate and his sister as to the disposition of his evenings; and, when not—as he very often is—professionally absent, makes his appearance as regularly as the tea-table, with his books under his arm. But, on the whole, they were almost as well without him: at least, to an outsider it would seem so, for to the sociability of the evening he contributes nothing but his presence, remaining immersed in his book from the moment of his appearance until the moment when Gillian's rising tells him that it is time to rise too, and solemnly present her with her candle. In fact, the gray parrot—the only great talker in the house—being by this time asleep, humped and fluffy in his ring, silence reigns undisturbed.

One evening things are thus taking their usual unexciting

course. Burnet by the table, book and elbows resting on it, hands thrust in his hair and meeting on his forehead, to make a pent-house for his eyes—a student so determined that no one who was not utterly void of tact would think of disturbing him; Gillian at the table too, over against him, fingering a pile of tracts and papers, and with rather more animation and less listlessness in air and feature than has of late been the case with her; Miss Burnet in her usual situation of supreme warmth and self-indulgent sloth. She is, however, not asleep, as her sniff testifies. In the complete stillness, Gillian catches herself waiting for and fidgetily expecting its recurrence. Her wakefulness is further evidenced by her presently rising, and, without any observation to either of her companions, making for the door.

"You are going?" says Burnet, lifting his eyes, and speaking in a tone of surprised interrogation.

"Apparently," she answers, dryly.

"Not to bed?"

"Yes, to bed!"

"But it is only half past nine," with an expostulatory glance at the clock.

"Whether it is half past nine or half past nineteen, I am going to bed," replies she, doggedly, tying her woolen shawl under her chin.

"You are not ill, I hope?" says Gillian, politely.

"Thank you, not at all."

"You had better stay half an hour longer," says Burnet, with some eagerness, following her, and laying his hand persuasively on her shoulder; "it will only be ten o'clock then."

"I am sorry to disoblige you," returns she, opening the door, "but I wish to go to bed."

He shrugs good-humoredly, and sits down again.

For a moment Gillian—she, too, has risen—remains standing irresolutely. Is she to be packed off to bed too, like a child, at 9.30, because a selfish old woman de-

clines to remain and chaperon her? Does he expect it of her? Let him expect, then. If he dislikes her society, it lies with him to abandon it. So she, too, reseats herself. For some moments entire silence, unbroken now even by a sniff. With the exception of the cessation of that tiresome sound, and of the emptiness of the arm-chair, any one would say that the situation was entirely unchanged. But, in the minds of the two dumb actors in it, it has undergone an entire transformation. The removal of that supine, selfish figure has introduced into their relations an element of *gêne* and awkwardness, against which each separately, and unsuspected by the other, is vainly struggling. Gillian has unintentionally imitated her companion's attitude; has put her elbows also on the table, and made a penthouse also of her hands, and under this penthouse her thoughts are running riot. Supposing that an absolute stranger to them and to their history were to be suddedly dropped into this peaceful *milieu*, to what conclusions would he naturally come? He would see two people—two young people. Involuntarily she snatches a peep at him through her fingers to decide whether a stranger would describe him as young (in point of fact, twenty good years stretch between him and his elderly half-sister)—yes, two fairly young people, seated alone, and within a yard of each other, the same good fire reddening the left cheek of the one and the right cheek of the other, the same tall duplex lamp flooding the pages on which their studious eyes are bent. To what conclusions must he come but that only the nearest and dearest of kinships, the closest and sweetest of human intimacies, could justify and explain this wordless proximity? Strangers, acquaintances, when thrown together, must politely talk; brother and sister, husband and wife, may be confidently, blessedly silent.

To make sure of the impression that the hypothetical stranger would receive, she again, without intending it, brings her eyes,

protected by her loosely clasped fingers, to bear upon him; and, lost in her idle speculations, forgets to turn them away.

Whether there is more intensity in her look than she is aware of, a mesmeric force that he feels even through his downcast eyelids—however that may be, he suddenly, and before she has time to avert her glance, looks up and catches her in the act. To her embarrassed fancy there is an impatient inquiry—a vexed asking for the explanation of her undesired scrutiny in his lifted eyes.

"I—I—beg your pardon," she says, confusedly. "I—I must apologize, but I was wondering why you put your fingers in your ears just now."

This is not exactly true, for, although the fact to which she alludes had excited her surprised notice some half an hour ago, it was certainly not the proximate cause of her observations. Apparently, her confusion is catching.

"Did I?" he says, in an alarmed voice. "Did you notice it? Did *she* notice it, do you think?" with a slight movement of the head toward the chair lately occupied by his sister.

"I should say not," replies Gillian, wondering. "She was looking at the fire the whole time."

"It is a bad habit," he says, in an ashamed tone. "I must break myself of it."

"It was an unnecessary precaution," [illegible], with an air of offended dignity. "Our conversation would not have disturbed you; neither of us had uttered [illegible] for the best part of an hour."

"You are mistaken," he cries, hastily. "[illegible] nothing to say to you; how could you imagine [illegible] the more you talk, the better I am pleased; but the fact is," speaking slowly, and a little sheepishly, "[illegible] a trick—a way of *sniffing*. I do not know why [illegible] noticed it—it is a mere nothing—but I am [illegible] it forgets me intensely if I am reading anything that requires any closeness

of attention. I find I can not concentrate my thoughts; I keep listening and waiting for the recurrence of that unlucky sniff."

"Do you?" cries Gillian, interrupting him eagerly, her whole face lit up, and her young eyes dancing in the fire-light with lively sympathy. "I am so glad! so do I!"

They both laugh low and suppressedly, as if she of whom they thus treasonably speak were still within earshot; their voices, too, have dropped to a slightly lower key, and they have edged their chairs a very little nearer each other.

"Do you?" says Burnet, merriment and genuine interest in look and tone. Then, all of a sudden, a change, the usual change, comes over him; it is as if he had recollected himself. He pushes back his chair again, as though a cold wind had crept into the room, and blown them apart. "I must thank you," he says, in his ordinary manner, "for having told me of a foolish habit; I must try to correct myself of it."

Gillian does not answer. Thus thrown back upon herself in her first moment of *épanchement*, she feels exceedingly blank. Perhaps the expression of this sudden change and decline from her momentary harmless gayety is written on her face, for, apparently, some compunction prompts him again to address her.

"You are busy," he says, with a rather clumsy attempt to find a remark, glancing at the half-penny tracts which her long, white fingers are slowly turning over.

"They are temperance tracts," she answers, pushing two or three across the table to him. "I do not know whether you are interested in the movement."

He takes them up, and glances at their titles. "The Losings Bank," "Drink; what it costs," "Put on the Break, Jim!"

"But—but I do not understand," he says, in a puzzled voice; "surely you are not reading these for your own amusement."

A slight smile hovers about her fresh mouth.

"No," she answers; "I am looking them over, in order to choose the most suitable for reading aloud."

"Reading aloud! to whom?" in a still more mystified tone, his thoughts jumping from himself to his sister—her, in his mind, only possible audience—and back again.

She smiles once more, a little superior, leaning back in her chair.

"It is a work that I am well used to," she answers, indirectly; "At least, I ought to be; I have had plenty of it."

He is still stupidly looking at her, with a total want of comprehension.

"I have always," she says, folding her round arms in her lap, and speaking didactically, "thought it *the* movement par excellence of the age; one that it is every one's bounden duty to forward as much as in them lies. I was determined to do my very utmost for it at Marlowe. We had a Temperance Room, open every market-day, to lure the farmers from the public houses, and which my cousins and I always superintended personally; and on Sunday evenings I held a class of confirmed drunkards. From fifteen to twenty young men attended it; I held it all the winter months, and during the whole time not one relapsed. No doubt," with a plaintive declension from her lofty tone, and a tearful droop of the corners of her mouth—"no doubt they have all relapsed now."

To this speech—the largest since the days of their warfare that she has ever addressed him—Burnet listens humbly and attentively, but at the end he still looks puzzled.

"But—but why *now?*" he says, inquiringly; "you have no temperance class now?"

"Not at this very moment," she answers, "but," firmly, "it is a want that I am on the very point of supplying; there is no reason why the work should not go on, though the scene is changed!" Then, seeing him look still keenly inter-

rogative, she continues: "Through the agency of a friend, who works in connection with a Sisterhood down at Westminster, I have hired a room in Little Pye Street, and mean to hold a class for young men there every Sunday evening, at eight o'clock, as I did at home." She stops a moment to take breath, and then, meeting with no interruption, she sails along again on the waves of complacent narrative: "We have already the promise of three, all inveterate drunkards and bad characters; that, of course, is only a nucleus, a beginning, but it will, no doubt, lead to better things."

She comes to a pause, and it is not evident why he has not hitherto broken in upon her speech. She has taken away his breath.

"Little Pye Street!—inveterate drunkards!—eight o'clock!" he echoes, in a succession of gasps. "Are you dreaming?"

"Dreaming!" she repeats, in an offended tone, thus suddenly awaked from her vision of triumphant philanthropy, and eyeing him coldly; "is it possible that you are not in sympathy with my plans?"

"Is it possible," retorts he, hotly, "that you are so ignorant of the world as to imagine that I could allow you—that it is within the bounds of possibility that you should be permitted to hazard yourself at that time of night among the roughs of Westminster?"

At the almost compassionate contempt for her lack of common sense conveyed in his tone, she bites her lip, paling a little.

"I am to understand, then," she says, in a constrained and haughty voice, "that you mean to oppose me?"

"Undoubtedly," he replies, emphatically. "If through your want of knowledge and experience, you are bent on exposing yourself to certain insult and probable danger, it is my bounden duty to prevent you."

As he speaks, his steady eyes meet hers; and there is

something in their resolved expression that makes her proud spirit chafe.

"I should have thought," she says, instantly taking her stand, with great presence of mind, on very high ground, "that, in a case of materially benefiting one's fellow creatures, one should not allow considerations of mere personal ease and comfort to intrude; though, even taking your own view, I think"—with a slightly sarcastic expression—"that you are unnecessarily alarmed. My friend has worked in Westminster for several years without meeting with any of the inconveniences you so needlessly apprehend for me."

He raises his eyebrows slightly.

"Indeed! And, may I ask, is she a lady of somewhat your age and appearance?"

Her proud eyes droop.

"No—o—o," she answers, reluctantly; "she is fifty, and—and—slightly humpbacked; but that is not the question."

"I think it is very much the question," he answers, dryly.

Her nostrils quiver.

"Of course, I can not tell whether you will admit him to be a good judge; but I must let you know that my uncle, Mr. Marlowe, always thoroughly approved of my efforts at home—promoted and encouraged my class in every possible way."

"The parallel between the two cases is so complete," he rejoins, ironically, "between the whole conditions and components of your class at home and that which you wish to gather hap hazard from the scum of Westminster."

"Is it possible," she says, her anger gathering volume at each fresh proof of how little impression her rhetoric makes, "that you think this an adequate mode of treating such a subject? Is it possible that you think that in such a matter I can consent to be contemptuously laughed down?"

"Excuse me, I am not laughing; and I see nothing to be contemptuous about."

"Perhaps you are not aware of it," she says, finally losing

her temper, which has been for some minutes escaping from her control; "perhaps, your manner is more galling than you are yourself aware of."

He bows his head.

"Perhaps; if it is so, I apologize."

"Although," she continues, her voice trembling more and more, and brighter sparks darting from her angry eyes—"although I see with astonishment that you are entirely out of sympathy with my aims, that the object I have in view fails to excite the faintest interest in your mind, yet I should have thought that a man like you, who must know the value and blessedness of work, might guess what a galling load the compelled idleness that you so nonchalantly lay on me must be."

He is still sitting by the table, his dark head leaned on his hand, and his eyes—tolerably calm, though once or twice a spark leaps from them too—attentively fixed upon hers, as if resolved to have her say out.

"You are not just to me," she continues, tremulously; "it is not in the nature of the case that you can be. You have always looked incredulous when I have alluded to my former usefulness; but can not even you," with a fiery emphasis and an accompanying flash of indignant flame from her steel-colored eyes, "understand what it must be to a woman with an active head, capable hands, and, God knows, a willing heart, to be kept in enforced idleness for six whole months of her life; and, if she makes an effort to break from her bondage of sloth, to be sent back to it with a sneer and a smile?"

At last she pauses; he waits a minute or two to be sure that she has quite finished; then:

"And is a class of Westminster drunkards the sole possible outlet from pure bondage of sloth?" he asks, disagreeably.

She throws up her willful head.

"I should have thought," she says, haughtily, "that it might have lain with me, at my age, to select what sphere of usefulness I chose. You once told me," flashing another indignant

look at him, "that the control you exercised over my actions would probably be purely nominal; when it comes to be tested by experience, I see how much truth there is in that assertion."

Whether this last thrust tells or not, she has no means of knowing, for his answer comes in a low, guarded tone that may mean either that it has missed altogether, or else that it has gone too truly home.

"I am compelled, by the authority that, as you know, I reluctantly exercise over you, to hinder you from thrusting yourself into situations for which, by your age, position, and appearance, you are eminently unsuited."

"Is there any situation, I wonder," she cries, passionately, "for which you think I am not unsuited?"

"Till the first of August," he continues, steadily—they have both risen, and are facing each other—"my responsibility lasts; on the second, you may, as you say, choose your own sphere of usefulness, and I can assure you that you need dread no interference from me."

So saying, he lights her candle, and, handing it to her with a cold, civil bow, puts an end to the argument.

SECOND THOUGHTS.

PART II.—Continued.

CHAPTER V.

"For every one knows
That there's nothing so filthy, so vulgar, as prose."

YES, the argument is ended, but so are not by any means the emotions it awoke. All through the night these rage and fume round Gillian's bed. It is a comfortable bed, soft and springy; but it might be stuffed with cannon-balls for all the ease or rest that she is able to draw from it. Nor is her pillow unwet by many briny tears—tears that, though no one sees them, she is heartily ashamed of shedding, and yet can not keep back. Their origin is partly—for we can not change our natures in a moment, no, nor yet in two months—a smarting pride at having her will met face to face in single combat, and worsted by another still robuster one; at having her judgment called in question, her ignorance compassionated, and her cherished plans quietly but irrevocably upset.

"I have not sufficient control over my temper," she says to herself, weeping; "but, oh! I should have been more than human if I had kept it! He is a good man," she says, sitting up in bed, in the dark, and wiping her eyes, "upright, honorable, true; but his sympathies are narrow, his aims low, his

prejudices inveterate; he has no feeling for the large needs of humanity."

But not even this praiseworthy effort to turn the tables and feel a superior pity for him and his contracted nature brings her much relief. A worse sting than any arising from chafed pride or baffled obstinacy has been left by their passage of arms. One would think that it would be of little consequence to her at this time of day what his opinion of her is; that she must, as she herself has so often said, be so irrevocably lost in his esteem that any efforts to regain it would be futile. But we all of us say many things that we do not mean.

"We had certainly begun to get on better," she says, still speaking aloud, in a low, distressed voice. "A stranger might not have noticed the difference, but every day the ice was thawing a little, and now—now—it is all the old state of things over again."

The old state of things, which she has latterly been so sedulously trying to wipe out of her memory, with a sort of superstitious idea that perhaps in proportion as it fades from her mind it may also from his. And here it all is back again—here in the dark, where every thought has such sharpness of outline, every image such vividness.

The night is old, and the cabs of belated revelers are giving way to the heavy morning wagons on the unresting pavement ere she wearily falls asleep. She wakes with a headache; not a very pleasant morning companion, but of which to-day she is rather glad, as it gives her a valid excuse for not appearing at breakfast. She knows that it is only putting off a little the evil day; that, as sure as one o'clock comes, he must issue from his consulting-room, and she from her boudoir, and the hostile forces again be set over against each other. Her boudoir is, indeed, to-day not available, as it is occupied by workmen, setting right something slightly amiss with the grate, so that even privacy is denied her. It is true that the drawing-room remains empty most of the morning, and that, when

her solitude is infringed, it is by a visitor of her own; but the feeling that at any moment some one may enter and surprise her, causes her a disproportionate constraint and *ennui*. She has dawdled down stairs languidly, still heavy-headed—the sprightly energy of the last few days, born of the hopeful prospect of employment, thrown back on itself—and has listlessly, with a flaccid body and mind, drawn a chair to the fire, and opened a book. Gillian is not very fond of reading; her active outdoor life has unfitted her for habits of sedentary occupation, and the hours lag. Even when an interruption comes, it does not to her mind greatly improve the state of things interrupted.

At about a quarter to one the butler brings her a card on a salver. "Mr. Francis Chaloner," she reads, taking it up carelessly, and for a moment she is puzzled as to who Mr. Francis Chaloner may be, so far from him have her thoughts been ranging. Then recollection comes back, accompanied by that rush of shrinking distaste with which everybody and everything connected, however remotely, with her first meeting with Burnet is now regarded in her mind.

"Mr. Francis Chaloner," she repeats, dreamily, "is he—" But before she can finish her sentence, the long pale poet stands before her.

"I am early," he says, with subdued sadness. "Perhaps too early. Do I derange you? Must I go?"

"Of course not," she answers, laughing nervously, and with a vigorous effort to shake off the fangs of memory which, at the sight of his Early Byzantine face and the sound of his faint voice, are planting themselves so deeply in her heart. "I am not busy. I am doing nothing. I never am doing anything now."

"What a terrible room!" he says, with a slight but perceptible shudder, his sorrowful eyes wandering round the room; the blinds pulled well up to the very top giving him plenty of light for examining the bold design and lively colors of the ex-

pensive carpet, the good, strong, undeniable blue of the carefully looped curtains, and the outlines of the first-class walnut drawing room suite, disposed with stiff neatness about the apartment.

"Do you think so?" replies Gillian, coldly; "I think I like it. One has had of late years such a surfeit of cholera blues and livid greens that one begins to long for magenta and arsenic back again."

But he does not heed; he is still looking, still slightly shivering.

"How ungraceful, how un-Greek!" he murmurs, half under his breath.

She reseats herself impatiently.

"I had heard that your *entourage* was unlovely," he continues, presently, "empty of rhythm and phantasy, but I had not anticipated anything quite so shocking."

"I tell you I like it," she says, perversely; "I find it a refreshing change from sunflowers and peacock's eyes."

He smiles mournfully.

"Please, may I sit here?" he asks, drawing a small stool to her feet, and carefully arranging himself so as to have his back to as much as is possible of the obnoxious furniture—in which, however, he is balked, as the large expanse of pier glass over the chimney-piece gives him back faithfully every detail. "I have brought you a little Ritournelle, as a Fruhlings Gruss," he says, presently, shaking back the long waves of his honey-colored hair. "I wished to read it to you, but I do not quite know whether I *could* read it here," glancing round apprehensively at the walnut suite.

"Why not?"

"It should be read," he says, gently, "to the low, pale sound of the viol or virginal, with a subtle perfume of dead roses floating about, while the eye is fed with porphyry vases and tender Tyrian dyes."

"Then it certainly can not be read here," replies Gillian,

with a dry but humorous glance at the India-rubber plant and the lusters under glass-shades.

"If you wish it, I will try," he says, with a soft sigh, putting his long, slight hand into his pocket, and drawing thence a faintly tinted, attar-scented manuscript.

"Is it long?" asks Gillian, with a covert but anxious look at the large-faced gilt clock.

"I think you will like the burden," he says, disregarding her query, while a faint flush of color steals into his pale face.

"Shall I?" says Gillian, absently; "what is it?"

His voice trembles a little:

"Ho! sick-sweet beryl eyes!"

"*Sick!*" says Gillian, in a demurring tone; "why *sick?* I do not like *sick!*"

"Surely," he says, gently but firmly, "there is nothing so beautiful as disease. The beauty of a pearl is greater than that of any other jewel because it is the beauty of disease."

He has gradually slidden from his stool on to the hearthrug, only his elbow now rests upon it. His wan face, propped by his hand, is lifted toward her. Before she can reply—which, indeed, she is in no hurry to do—a hand, a busier, quicker hand, as she well knows, than the butler's, is laid on the door-handle; the door opens, and Burnet hurriedly enters. Her first glance at his face shows his thoughtful forehead furrowed by its usual look of overworked preoccupation, but, as his eye lights on the little tableau before him—the utter, intimate abandonment of posture of the graceful youth, of whose presence in his house even he had had no suspicion—a rapid change, such a change as Gillian afterward can neither qualify nor account for, passes over his features.

"I beg your pardon," he says, in a dry voice; "I thought my sister was here," and so prepares to shut the door as quickly as he opened it.

"She is—she was—I mean she will be," cries Gillian, incoherently, jumping up and running impulsively after him. She overtakes him on the landing.

"Please come back," she says, breathlessly; "I want you to allow me to introduce you to my acquaintance—my *slight* acquaintance"—with a painstaking accent on the adjective—"Mr. Chaloner."

"If you wish it, I shall be happy," he says, unpleasantly, looking the while at her eager, young eyes and the mortified carmine of her pretty cheeks, with an expression in which admiration is apparently not the predominant feeling.

To the drawing-room they return; the presentation takes place, and at the same moment the luncheon-bell rings.

"You will give us the pleasure of your company at luncheon, I hope," says Burnet, with ceremonious, smileless politeness.

"You are very good," replies the other, the same slight shiver passing over his fragile form at the sound of Burnet's quick, decided voice, at the sight of his keen, practical face, as had been produced by the carpet and curtains; "but luncheon to me means a wafer, a grape, a few sirup drops." Then, turning to Gillian, and fastening upon her the sleepy sorrow of his sunken eyes in a pale yet lingering look: "It has been very solemn and precious," he says, simply. "Auf Wiedersehen!"

Five minutes later, the wonted three are seated at the luncheon table.

"I was told that you had a headache," says Miss Burnet, her eyes fixed with brutal directness on the girl's hot bloom. "I can not say that I see much trace of it."

Explain it who may, but Miss Burnet is seldom pleased at any one but herself laying claim to an ailment of any sort. It is rarely, indeed, that she does not throw doubts upon its authenticity.

"But in very truth I have," replies Gillian; "in fact," half turning with an anxious look toward Burnet, "if I had

not had one already, I think that the ordeal I have been passing through this morning was quite enough to give me one."

She ends with a nervous, appealing laugh, which finds no echo in either of her companions. Miss Burnet seldom laughs; never at any one else's jokes. If she is moved to rare and difficult mirth, it is at some recondite jest of her own that no one else sees. Neither does Burnet move a muscle. His eyes remain fixed with an expression of explicit ill-humor on his plate; nor does he offer either observation or inquiry.

"As for you, John," says his sister, presently, changing the direction of her glance, and employing her usual unsparing faithfulness in the mode of her address, "you are as yellow as a crow-flower. For my part, I never knew a water-drinker that was not. Nasty, cold stuff! sure, sooner or later, to destroy the tone of the stomach."

The object of this attack makes no answer beyond a gesture of excessive impatience, and she goes on:

"It is not even as if you had been brought up to it, but to take it at your time of life—"

"Pshaw!" he cries, breaking in upon her speech with an accent of extreme vexation, "for Heaven's sake, find some more interesting topic of conversation than what I drink, or what I do not drink!"

So saying, he pushes back his chair from the table, and, darting a fiery look at his sister, without ceremony or apology leaves the room. She looks after him with an air of such complete astonishment, as reveals to Gillian how *very* rare an occurrence it is in this case for the worm to turn.

For some moments Miss Burnet does not speak. Then, shaking her iron-gray head, "it is his liver!" she says, tersely. "I knew how it would be."

"Is it possible?" says Gillian, in a low awed voice, "did I understand you aright? Do you mean to say that Dr.

Burnet drinks water on principle—that he .... taken the pledge?"

"Principle! Pledge!" repeats Miss Burnet, in a tone of the most ireful contempt. "Pooh! I should like to know how many fewer drunkards there are likely to be at the end of the year because he is such a fool as to choose to make himself dyspeptic by docking his couple of glasses of sherry!"

"But surely," rejoins the girl, in a rather didactic tone, "that line of reasoning would tend to paralyze individual effort in every direction."

"And a very good thing if it did," says the other, rudely.

A slight ironical smile steals over Miss Latimer's face.

"There is reason in roasting eggs," continues Miss Burnet, in a surly tone, beginning to huddle her Shetland shawl about her shoulders preparatory to a move, "but there is none in a man like John—a consulting surgeon in large practice, who never has a moment he can call his own, who is at work all day and very often all night too—moidering his brain with temperance meetings, cocoa-houses, temperance papers, and such trash."

During this speech a deep color of mixed shame and joy has kept flowing into Gillian's cheeks.

"But does he?" she says, in an eager voice, fixing her sparkling eyes on the sour old face before her.

"Does he indeed!" repeats the other, pregnantly, with a dry laugh, and so gathers herself out of her chair and goes.

CHAPTER VI.

A FOG has come on. The gas has to be lit three hours before its time; all the world beyond the window-panes is choking yellow vapor, and Gillian's drive is given up. To-day she does not, as has been her wont in such cases, seek the warm, still privacy of her own sitting-room; on the contrary, she chooses voluntarily the society of her hostess. If her motive has been to draw out still further that lady on the subject which had occupied them at luncheon, she is not rewarded by the success she deserves.

Miss Burnet, after her short spurt of talkativeness, has declined into a solid lethargic silence. And when Miss Burnet feels inclined to be silent, neither man nor woman can make her talk; as, on the other hand, if she is disposed for conversation, no sense of time, place, nor fitness can stop her. At the end of several hours of persevering and laborious pumping, Miss Latimer has not arrived at much beyond the main facts already in her possession. From her companion's surly monosyllables and grumbling admissions, she has indeed gathered beyond a doubt that Dr. Burnet, although the incessant occupation of his profession renders it impossible for him actively to participate in it, is yet with heart and soul, with all the energies of his eager mind, by precept and example, among every class with which he comes in contact—among the students at the hospital which he daily visits, among the poor whom he daily sees, among the higher classes in which his practice chiefly lies—trying to help that great effort, his indifference toward which she had condemned. At dinner-time she is walking slowly down stairs, with her head hanging, and her heart and conscience full of him, when she comes suddenly face to face with him on the landing outside the drawing-room

door. He has been running up two steps at a time, and would now pass her with a constrained smile and a half-bow, when, seeing him thus about to slip away from her—to her he seems now always to be slipping away from her—she stretches out her hand detainingly toward him.

"Are you in a great hurry?" she asks, in a quick, embarrassed voice: "I wished to speak to you for a minute."

"I am always in a hurry, I am sorry to say," he answers, his face relaxing a little in spite of himself; "but of course I am at your service."

It is a stiff way of wording it, and so she feels.

"It is nothing of any consequence," she says, in a chilled voice; "of course I might just as well have said it to you the first moment I found you at leisure, but I could not rest until I had asked your pardon—until I had owned to you how grossly I had wronged you, as to—as to the subject we were discussing last night."

He looks silently at her; at the gracious figure, the well-poised head, the sweetly apologetic face. One would think that together they made a pleasant picture for a tired man coming home from painful sights, and yet he turns his eyes away. She attributes his muteness and his gesture to an inveterate displeasure.

"Are we never to do justice to each other?" she cries, in a despairing voice. "Are we never to see each other as we are?"

Then he speaks.

"You say that you wish to beg my pardon," he says, in a quick, nervous voice. "I must tell you that I meant to seek you for a like purpose—that is, to beg yours. I came up with that object to the drawing-room this morning, but"—his voice growing frosty—"I found you engaged."

"Did you indeed?" she cries, with an accent of unaffected joy. "I mean, did you really intend to beg my pardon?—and what for?"

"I spoke to you unjustifiably, in a tone that I had no right to adopt; and though," with a rather obstinate shake of his dark head, "I still think I was right in the main—"

"And *I* still think that *I* was right in the main!" interrupts she, merrily, her excellent spirits rising elastic from the pressure which ever since their last night's quarrel has lain upon them. "I have not, as you know," with a contrite droop of head and eyelids, "much control over my temper, and last night I was injudicious and Pharisaic; but oh! I think I was right in struggling for a little work. If you knew—but that of course you never *can* know—how long the hours are when they are quite, *quite* empty!"

He looks at her with a sort of wistfulness. In the gas-light his face is very weary.

"I am afraid it is very dull for you," he says, gently; "but you must remember that it is not for long—that it will soon be over."

"That is true," she answers, quietly.

"And I hope," he pursues, earnestly, "that you will try to alleviate as much as may be the *gêne* of your position by seeing as many of your friends here as possible. I was afraid afterward," speaking with an evident effort over himself, "that I had treated the one I saw with you this morning with some discourtesy. I hope that you will explain to him that I meant nothing—that it was only manner."

"I have already tried to disabuse you of the idea that that person was a friend of mine," replies Gillian, in a nettled tone. "Since you persist in treating him as such—"

There is such evident angry veracity in look and voice that his brow clears.

"I am convinced," he says, smiling a little. "I suppose"—rather demurely—"that I must have been misled by his attitude."

She smiles also, and blushes slightly.

"It was enough to mislead any one," she says, impatiently

then: "But now that all misunderstandings between us are cleared up," he starts perceptibly, as if this were to him quite a new view—"let us return to our subject. You will see that I am obstinate, not easily baffled. I am sure," in an almost coaxing tone, "that if you would, you could find me work."

"Could I?" he says, thoughtfully, eyeing rather appraisingly, as to its capabilities, her robust yet delicate beauty. "I should not wonder if I could; but of what kind?"

"*Any* kind!" she cries, vehemently; "I am not particular. Anything that this head," lightly touching it with her finger, "can plan, or these hands," stretching them forth toward him, "can carry out!"

Her whole face is lit up as if a lamp were burning inside it. Perhaps her enthusiasm is catching.

"We will see," he says, slowly.

"It is a bargain!" she cries, gayly. "We will talk details over to-night." Then, seeing that he is about to interrupt her: "No, I will hear no 'Buts' or 'Ifs;' and I am making you so late. *Au revoir.*"

With a gracious, friendly movement of her head, she leaves him and runs lightly down to the drawing-room; her whole being happily astir, her headache gone and forgotten, her brain busily working, all her pulses beating to a joy-tune. In imagination she is already planning out their evening—his and hers. Miss Burnet will almost certainly again go to bed early, and the *tête-à-tête* of yesterday will be repeated—repeated, yes—but with a difference; what a difference! Shortly, dinner is announced, and she and her hostess go down. Burnet very often only joins them in the dining-room. But in entering this room a feeling of blank disappointment comes over her, as she perceives that only two places are laid. They are halfway through their soup before she can command her voice to ask, in a tone of indifference, that question which for ten minutes has been hovering on her lips:

"Dr. Burnet is not coming?"

"John dines out," replies his sister, briefly.

The fish has followed the soup, and in its turn has passed away, before another remark is made. Then, perhaps to reward Gillian for not having put any questions to her while she was eating—a thing to which she specially objects—Miss Burnet adds a second observation:

"As it is with friends of yours, I should have thought he might have told you."

"Friends of mine!" repeats Gillian, in a puzzled voice; "what friends—who?"

"I never remember names," rejoins the other, in a bored voice, as if nothing should induce her to make any effort to recall this one; "but I presume they were friends of yours, as they hung about you a good deal—more than I should have liked—when they lunched here the other day."

"The Tarltons?" cries Gillian, in an incredulous tone.

"Yes, that is it."

"But I did not know—I had no idea that they were acquainted," with an accent that she tries to make only surprised, but which would be clearly perceived by any one who knew her well to be also one of poignant vexation.

"Why, it was your doing; they met here," says Miss Burnet, brusquely; then, "he must have been finely late," she goes on, with a look at the clock. "I never saw him in such a fuss and fidget in my life; he seemed quite put out because some one had detained him."

"I am afraid that I was that some one," says Gillian, with a forced laugh, though her voice falters a little. "I stopped him on the stairs for a few minutes, to speak to him—on—business."

"And he did not tell you? Humph! I can not think why he should make mystery of it. I have no patience with mysteries."

There is another large tract of silence—a silence during which Gillian forgets to eat, and which she spends in asking

herself disagreeable questions to which there are no answers. If her liking for him—she has been gradually coming to own for some time past that such a thing exists—if her liking for him were not a selfish one, would not she be glad and thankful that he should be now, after his long day's work, unbending his tired mind, and refreshing his fagged body in the society of an appreciative woman—to Gillian's mind, the evening presents herself under the form of an unbroken *tête-à-tête* with Sophia, instead of making one of that mournful trio in which she has nightly seen him play his dismal third?

"Did he tell you whether they were to be alone, or if it was to be a dinner-party?" she asks, by and by rousing herself.

"Who?" says Miss Burnet, in a tone that reveals to the girl how long has been the interval since her last remark—"John? I had forgotten all about him," with a shrug. "I never asked him. I begged him to come upstairs quietly on his return; there is nothing I hate more than being waked out of my first sleep."

CHAPTER VII.

This is Gillian's earliest sip of a cup of which she afterward takes many a draught. She could hardly tell you how many—they have been so numerous—between the evening we have just mentioned, and the May month that is now here, the froward May month that all the foolish poets have chosen for their pet and darling.

It has been a churlish, laggard spring. To Gillian it has seemed as if the trees in the parks would never unfold their cold tight buds, and that the shrewish east wind would for ever blow. It has gone at last; for a few days only, to return

probably and tarnish the glories of early June; but now, at least, it is away. The air is as soft as silk: in the sooty square-gardens, on the black lilac and laburnum bushes have come bunches of delicious new flowers that one can hardly believe to belong to them. Every one that is country-hearted is beginning to long for the sight of the frolicsome lambs, and the voice of the speckled thrush. The houses have all clean faces; the shutters are down, and the window-boxes planted for the summer.

In the park the afternoon sun shines on an endless flutter of gay parasols, luster of satin-coated horses, and flash of bright harness; to the doors of all the great shops lead avenues of bored footmen, and the spring captains have come forth in might.

The town is full, and the season in mad swing. Even to Gillian, though she had supposed herself to be not going out, it has brought a press of engagements. Although she has taken no pains to advertise her presence, her acquaintance have found her out in swarms. Although warned by the egregious mistake she had once made in this direction, she tries honestly not to credit them with mercenary motives, yet the reflection will recur of how much more sisterly to her are the sisters, how much more motherly the mothers, than they were this time last year. In the men she detects less difference. To do them justice, they had always made much of her; but, even in some of them, she can not help tracing a shade or two more of *empressement* than had been the case in her three former seasons. Nor is it only the business of pleasure that now makes Miss Latimer's life as full as it had once been empty. Burnet has been as good as his word; he has found her work. It is true that the idea of the Sunday-evening class for drunkards has, by tacit consent on both sides, been abandoned, but its place has been taken by other schemes as useful and less injudicious. He is apparently not much more afraid of work for her than he is for himself.

In tracing up, following out, and examining into the many cases of distress which daily come before him, among the poor whom he sees gratis from nine to ten in the morning, she has found a vein of occupation and interest not likely to be soon worked out. Nor is this all. As soon as—which is very soon—her accession to fortune has become noised abroad in the world, there is never a post which does not bring her applications from some charitable society for help of purse, head, or hands. It is on his judgement that she has grown implicitly to rely as to the greater or less usefulness of these associations, as to which appeals are to be acceded to, and which denied. For her part, being large hearted and quite ignorant of the value of money, she would fain say "Yes" to them all, but on this he must needs put his veto. If, however, he is useful to her, so is she also to him, as she sometimes tells herself with a throb of pride. Does not she, besides all her other work, carry flowers to the patients in his ward at the hospital? Does not she help him with the Shakespeare readings that he gets up among the convalescents? Does not she talk with gracious fluency to the awkward medical students whose welfare he is so anxious to promote, and whom he so often asks to dinner? Once he had almost, nay, half told her, that she was his right hand, and, though he had stopped himself in time, had laboriously explained away and eaten his words, yet, that they had once been hovering on his lips, she would maintain with her last breath.

This is the sunny side of the picture; it is vain to deny that there is also a shady one. It is useless to disguise that—so far from the discovery of the oneness of their aims in the main having produced entire hamony in the details—their first quarrel on the subject of Gillian's good works has not been by any means their last. It has been followed by many others, not by any means inferior in acrimony to the first, garnished with quite as many sour looks and biting words. Gillian has always taken the high ground of principle; Burnet has always

remained on the flat level of plain common-sense, and they have both invariably ended by losing their tempers.

Their discords have mostly arisen from a determined tendency on the part of Miss Latimer to trample with lofty disdain on the minor conventionalities of life, to travel, when quite alone, by preference and on principle—all Gillian's follies are matters of principle—in omnibuses and penny steamboats, to thrust herself—strong in the consciousness of her own lofty rectitude—into equivocal situations, which a less innocent woman would have shunned. It is from this proclivity, coming into collision with Burnet's resolute determination to draw her back and keep her, as long as his control over her shall last, in the safe beaten path of use and wont, that most of their many jars are born. Most, but not all. There is another and far more unpleasant cause of disunion between them. Whether it be through the fatuous vanity of mankind that hurries, however warned, to its doom, or through some defect in her own power of making herself understood, certain it is that three or four men have already this season had the misfortune to be refused by Miss Latimer. Specially has she been teased by Chaloner. She has been compelled to hear the whole of the "Fruhlings Gruss," and has discovered, with much surprise and more disgust, that the "sick-sweet beryl eyes" apostrophized in that luscious lyric are none other than her own perfectly healthy and extremely angry gray ones. He has braved the pain caused him by the Burnet upholstery so far as to pay her several more morning visits, occasionally, during them, drawing from his pocket a piece of high art cretonne with which to revive his eyes when he feels that the India-rubber plant and the loud carpet are growing too much for him.

On each occasion, as ill luck will have it, Burnet has blundered in upon them, and has found him either stretching his amorous length of flaccid limb on the rug at her feet, or dismally poised on a small stool at her knee, or sorrowfully warbling to his mandolin over against her. And, as in this world

actions will always be held to speak louder than words, not all her subsequent scoffs at his expense, not all the jeers industriously sown along her after-conversation can avail to remove from Burnet's mind the impression that his is not only a welcome but an invited presence.

Although he says nothing, her guardian's eyes and manner plainly conveys to Gillian that to her he attributes the blame of all her catastrophes. In addition to the many grave failings with which he has already credited her, she now feels that in his own mind he has branded her as a hardened flirt.

This discovery has cost her many bitter tears, and, in wakeful hours of night and unrest, she has often straightly questioned herself as to whether there be indeed any truth in this mute accusation; whether now and again she may not indeed have been tempted to make others feel the pangs of despised love; the pinch of that pain which has of late grown to be her daily portion. For Nemesis, slow-footed but sure, has overtaken Gillian.

At the feet of the man whom, five months ago, she had waved from her with words that insulted, and insinuations that outraged, she has now laid her proud heart; nor does he—which is worse—show any least intention of picking it up.

Through fourteen weeks—how long to look forward to! how short in retrospect!—she has closely watched his manner of life. His good qualities she has learned by heart, and his weaknesses she knows as well as, perhaps better, than she does her own. She has been a daily witness of his energy, his thoroughness, his clear-headed, large-hearted love of his fellows. She has watched his struggles against the irritability of his temper when over-tired, harassed, or disappointed; and his disproportionate remorse when he has given way to it.

She has seen his great patience with his sister, his tenderness to her who gives him no tenderness back again—having, indeed, none to give—his resolved endurance of her whims and freaks, even when they clash and jar most with his own

dearest schemes and ideas. Her sniff, her screeching parrot, her delusions as to her own want of appetite and general fragility; the invariability of the way in which she unhesitatingly makes his convenience courtesy to hers—these are small things. Far, far worse than any of these—far harder for him to endure—are her obstinately unwise benevolences, the haphazard charity that gathers round her an army of able-bodied vagabonds and robust impostors. But yet he does it.

The end of May has come, and it is perhaps as well for Gillian—though she is far from thinking so—that the throng of engagements it brings has entirely put an end to those short evening *tête-à-têtes* which had at one time become common between her and her guardian. It may be, it most probably is, mere accident, but it certainly comes about that if ever she has a free evening, he is sure in his turn to be either professionally or socially engaged.

To-night they both dine out. They set off for their different destinations at the same moment—Miss Latimer is to pick up her chaperon *en route*—nor can Gillian avoid overhearing the address given by Burnet to his servant. It is that of the house for which the Tarltons have lately exchanged their rooms at Garland's Hotel.

Gillian has long given up inquiring into the number of times that Burnet dines with the Tarltons; in fact, she tries as much as possible to avoid hearing it; and though, whenever they see each other, Sophia keeps her anxiously advertised of the frequency of her meetings with Dr. Burnet and the progress of their friendship, yet, as the advancing season has given her a good opportunity for retiring gradually and unobserved from the Tarlton intimacy, this happens seldomer than might be supposed.

To-night, however, the Tarltons have a small, semi-musical "At home," at which they have, with an irresistible urgency of affection, insisted on her appearing. She had far fainer not. Her spirits are jaded, and she tells herself that she is certain

to see and hear words and looks to which she had much rather shut eyes and ears. But it can not be. Nothing short of explaining the true reason of her disinclination could save her from their insistances.

So, at about eleven o'clock, she finds herself entering their drawing-room. It is filling fast, and an unlucky young gentleman, who, in an evil hour for himself, has been induced to promise to recite a poem in the Dorsetshire dialect called "Come Who am," and who is now, with a view to that purpose, standing beside the piano, with a row of bedroom candlesticks on the floor before him to represent footlights, has been already several times obliged by the bustle made by fresh arrivals to suspend his exertions and begin all over again. To Gillian it is always afterward doubtful whether he ever gets beyond the exordium: "A poem in the Dorsetshire dialect, 'Come Who-am.'" That is, at least, all that she ever hears of it.

He is followed by a professional singer, who is listened to with the respectful attention always paid by the British public to anything that is known or surmised to have cost a good deal of money.

Miss Latimer has found a seat, and is taking advantage of the silence imposed by the song to seek out, with her eyes, her acquaintance among the throng. At least, that is the way in which she would have explained her occupation, had she been questioned about it. It is not, however, until the end of the aria that she discovers the special two whom she seeks. Far off, in an adjoining room, which, owing to its distance from the musicians and from a tiny foreign princekin who is the star and lion of the evening, is far less crowded than this one, intermittently seen between the wide-flung folding-doors, she finds them. She has a distinct, though distant view, of Sophia's face, quite distinct enough to see that it is flushed, animated, radiant. Of Burnet her vision is less complete; a continued succession of bobbing heads, shifting figures, glancing diamonds, conspire to hide him from her; only an occa-

sional glimpse serves to verify the fact that the dark head bent in interested attention to the eager, voluble girl is none other than his. She is still yielding to the disagreeable fascination of peeping under people's arms and over their shoulders at the unwelcome spectacle, when her attention is claimed by Anne, who, not having been able to gather round her any of her own special ministering spirits, is not in the best of humors. After a few pettish complaints of the heat of the room, and the dullness of this particular form of entertainment, she asks :

"How do you think Sophia is looking to-night?"

"How do I think Sophia is looking?" repeats Gillian, yielding—thus taken suddenly and unawares—to an unjustifiable access of ill-humor; "why, extremely plain, as she always does."

"That is what I say!" cries Anne, warmly. "How well you always express yourself! and now that she has taken it into her head to be clever, that she is always standing up on her hind legs, so to speak!"

"Sophia is certainly nothing if not intelligent," rejoins Gillian, sarcastically; and then, bitterly ashamed of her own unhandsome spitefulness, she rises hastily, and turns to greet one of the many admirers who are always lying in wait to pounce upon her.

In this case it is Chaloner, who, unwarned by the fate of the Dorsetshire genius, has been reciting Rossetti's "Blessed Damosel," and has been leaning

"From the gold bar of Heaven"

so far over the bedroom candles as to have hardly breath left to ask for the encomiums he has come to receive. Being off her guard and preoccupied by her own emotions, she may possibly throw more cordiality into her manner than, warned by her late disasters, has of late been the case with her. At least she conjectures it must be so when she finds the present sufferer, urging upon her with a sorrowful inveteracy a request,

already oft repeated, to join the Tarltons in a visit to that studio which he has lately set on foot, in order that those sister arts in which he has attained about equal eminence may run hand in hand.

She is anxiously warding off his melancholy importunities, when Sophia, passing hastily by, catches sight of and at once stops to speak to her.

"I am off—out of earshot, if possible!" she says, shrugging. "Can you believe it? Anne is going to sing 'On the Blue Alsatian Mountains!'"

"And why should not she?"

"*Why should not she!* Did you ever hear of such presumption?—immediately after Blank and Blank! At all events, I am determined not to stay and hear one of my nearest relations expose herself!"

She half moves away, but, apparently bethinking herself, comes back.

"We shall meet to-morrow!" she says, cheerfully; "it is settled that I am to lunch with you. He is going to take me over King's Hospital."

"*He!*—who?" says Gillian, obstinately obtuse, but paling a little.

"Did I say *he?*" with a slightly conscious smile; "how stupid! Of course I meant Dr. Burnet. I have never been over one of the London hospitals; he is to explain the whole working of it to me. It is a subject that interests me extremely."

"Has not it rather newly come to you?" rejoins Gillian, with a grim smile. "I never remember any signs of your developing such a taste at home."

"At home I was always thwarted when I tried to strike out a line of my own," replies Sophia, loftily; "here, I begin to feel my footing freer. *A demain!*"

Divided between smiles of complacency at herself and her

future, and righteous ire at her sister's fatuity, she vanishes from view.

"It is an engagement, then," says Gillian, turning, with a sudden laugh and an eye-flash to her petitioner, who, though now almost hopeless of success, has remained standing, like a long pale willow wand, beside her, "at five o clock to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE morrow has come, and with it luncheon-time and the Tarltons. Both girls arrive, though only one is to take part in the expedition that is the motive of their appearance. Love for Gillian, and a suspicion that her sister had rather she had staid away, have been the mixed inducements that have brought the other.

Luncheon is just over, and the brougham has set forth on its way. The two remaining girls watch its departure from the window of the dining-room, which they have not yet left.

"Do not you call it rather a strong measure?" says Anne, in a confidential voice. "I am sure if I were to take a *tête-à-tête* drive with a bachelor in his brougham everybody would hold up their hands in horror—I should be drummed out of society; but I suppose in the case of a doctor all laws are suspended."

"And to the claims of philanthropy every minor consideration must give way," says Gillian, with a bitter little laugh, having not yet got over the sight of Sophia's beaming face and waving hand as she was borne away.

"Did not she look elated?" pursues Anne, ill naturedly. "Some people are easily pleased, and, after all, he has never paid her any real attention; not"—with a superior smile—"what you and I would call attention."

Gillian does not answer, except by a slight flush of pleasure, of which she is thoroughly ashamed, and a moment afterward changes the subject.

At a quarter to six that afternoon Miss Latimer's victoria draws up at the entrance to that block of studios of which Mr. Chaloner's forms one. She has taken pains to be late, so that there may be no doubt as to Mrs. Tarlton and Anne, who are to meet her there, having had plenty of time to arrive before her. To tell truth, she has begun heartily to repent of her last night's concession. She has even gone so far as to solicit Miss Burnet for her company and countenance, but has been met with the candid and point-blank denial which she might have expected.

"I am much obliged to you, but I am no judge of pictures. I had far rather not."

Chaloner himself comes to help her from her carriage, his hair flowing in a long fair fell over his shoulders, and a lotus lily in one pale hand.

"This is too utterly sweet!" he says, in a low and tremulous voice, not holding out his hand, for the votaries of the Higher Cult do not shake hands; they are too much in silent sympathy with each other to need this Philistine expression of welcome. She springs out without his assistance.

"Are they here?" she asks, hastily, rushing headlong into his poet's greeting. "Have Mrs. and Miss Tarlton come yet?"

"They will be here soon—too soon!" he answers, sadly, leading her in.

As the door of the studio closes upon her, and she perceives that, for the moment at least, she is the only guest, her heart sinks.

"They have treated me very ill," she says, with an accent of vexation; "they promised to be punctual! Thank you, no," as he places a seat for her and offers her a peacock fan; "I had rather stand." Then, with a slight increase of affability,

as she catches a glimpse of her own image, somber and pouting, in a Venetian mirror—"I mean I had rather walk about and see your things."

At once he is ready with pensive obsequiousness to comply, and for the next ten minutes Gillian, absent-minded and uneasy, strays about among dead gold screens, sodden, blurred hangings, Japan tea-pots, and wry-necked Byzantine virgins.

On easels stand various pictures in different stages of finish: all, however variously named, being representations—either alone or multiplied by several—of the same livid, dislocated woman; the same woman, carrot-headed, thumb-nosed, sunk-chested—almost always backed by sunflowers, and invariably swaddled in unwholesome draperies. All are baptized by the names of the beautiful goddess and youthhood of Greece. Shades of Cytherea and Hylas, pardon!

Before almost all, as before an altar, a great white lily stands in a large blue vase. As they come to a stop before one last head, even more touzled and apparently further sunk in consumption than any of the previous ones, Chaloner makes a reverential pause.

"This is the Master's!" he says, with bated breath; "is not it entirely precious? I daily offer fresh flowers before it; it is Amor Dolorosus!"

"*Amor!*" she cries, scornfully; "*Love!* I thought it was cholera!"

Chaloner shudders a little, as if a goose had walked over his grave, though certainly so ignoble a comparison would never occur to his mind.

"I think," he says, in a wounded voice, "that you do not quite follow the Master's meaning; perhaps it is too intense for you?"

"Perhaps," she answers, contemptuously, turning away; "at the best of times I have not much opinion of dolorous love."

"And yet," he says, mournfully, "it can never be truly

rhythmical and sweet unless it is laved with the chrism of tears!"

As he ends there is a break in his voice; and she finds with horror that he is sinking on his faint knees on the Persian carpet beside her. At the same moment the studio-door openes hastily, and a man enters quickly crying, cheerfully:

"I have only five minutes to spare; but you have so often asked me to look in upon you, and, as I have some patients in this direction, I thought I might take you in my way. Oh!" —catching sight of the tableau so clearly not intended for any third pair of eyes, though even now he does not instantly recognize the back of his ward's bonnet, and his voice growing suddenly aghast—"I—I—see I—must have mistaken the studio. I—I—beg to apologize! What!" as the bonnet veers slowly round toward him—"*Miss Latimer!*"

There is a terrible pause, during which Chaloner manages to slide to his feet again, and Burnet's fiery eyes remain fastened with an expression which she would hardly like to qualify, on the face—apparently made all of poppies—of his luckless charge.

"Do you happen to have seen anything of the Tarltons?—I mean Mrs. Tarlton and Anne?" she stammers at last—it is so likely, in his transit in his broughan from sick room to sick-room, that he should. "They were to have met me here to-day; but they have played me false."

He does not appear to think this query worthy of an answer; at least he gives none. Only his glance changes its direction a little, and she sees it taking in all the details—which she knows will be most abhorrent to him—of her surroundings: the sickly virgins and diseased Aphrodites; the votive pots; and, lastly, the fragil tea-cups and sugared rose-leaves prepared for her refection, and clearly betokening that she either has made or means to make some considerable stay. At his [illegible] manly ignoring of her civil question, and at the tyranny of [illegible]

eyes, her spirit rises. He shall see that she is not of the stuff of which Griseldas are made.

"They have clearly forgotten their engagement," she says, turning to Chaloner, and speaking with composure, though her cheeks do not cool. "I think I had better go home."

"I quite agree with you," says Burnet, though it is not he whom she has addressed, in a very low voice—so low as to be only audible to herself; and as she leaves the studio, he follows her with the visibly ostentatious air of implying that she is not again to be trusted alone.

With silent morosity, he hands her into her victoria, and she drives off.

She had hoped that they would not be called upon again to meet on that day—that their next encounter might be deferred until both had had time to cool down; for under the unjust and tyrannical suspicion of his look her own spirit has risen; but unluckily it turns out otherwise.

Both are still at boiling-point—in fact, by brooding on their several wrongs, the fever of each temper is sensibly heightened—when they unfortunately meet accidently on the stairs. She is running down, dressed for dinner, to her brougham, and he is running up, when they come together on the landing. She fully expects him to stand aside and let her go by; but instead he bars her passage.

"May I speak to you for five minutes?" he asks, in a severe voice.

"Is it anything of much importance?" she asks, summoning up a nonchalant air. "Will not it do as well to-morrow?"

"If you do not mind, I had rather say what I have to say to-night."

She makes no further objection, but leads the way into the drawing-room, and he, following her, shuts the door. Apparently, however, what he has to say is not easy to begin upon, for during a few minutes an awkwark silence reigns. Gillian is

firmly resolved not to help him, and, walking to the window, looks out, and presently remarks, in a careless tone:

"The brougham is there; I shall be late."

"I can not help it if you are," he answers, suddenly, gaining words. "I could not let the night pass over our heads—I could not reconcile it to my conscience—without asking you for an explanation—without remonstrating—without warning you!"

"*Without warning me!*" she repeats, turning from the window, and facing him in ireful majesty, while her eyes blaze, and the Mary lilies on her breast tremble and shake with the beatings of her angry heart, "against what? You must, if you please, be more lucid, if you wish me to understand you."

"If it were not for the unnatural position we occupy toward each other," he says, taking up from and again throwing down on the table a book in passionate, fidgety irritation, "it would, of course, be no business of mine; but, as it is, my duty to you compels me to ask, whether the explanation given by you of your presence in Mr. Chaloner's studio this afternoon, and to which I noticed that you gave utterance very hesitatingly and lamely, was the true one?"

"Of course not," she answers, with cutting scorn; "why do you ask? Of course it was a pure invention."

He looks at her uneasily, his forehead wrinkled with vexation and doubt; but yet apparently his worst apprehension is removed.

"You must own," he says, still very hotly, though in a voice that is rather less inquisitorial and more conciliatory, "that the situation in which I found you was one that required some explanation."

"And I," she says, haughtily, her temper waxing worse as his grows better, "for my part, think that it was your uninvited intrusion into Mr. Chaloner's studio which requires explanation and apology."

"I have already explained to you," he cries, vehemently, his

eyes flashing at the calm insolence of her look; "I explained at once that it was a pure mistake! I had long promised to look in some day on my friend ——, and in the hurry of the moment I mistook the one studio for the other."

"It was a very singular error," she says, with a sneer. "Mr. Chaloner's name is very plainly printed over his door."

"You may imply, if you choose, that I am telling falsehoods," he says, violently; then, mastering himself with an untold effort, he breaks off, and after a while says, almost quietly, though the heaving of his chest and the quiver of his sensitive nostrils plainly tell of the storm within, "I daresay you think that I stretch my authority further than is justifiable."

"I think," she says, regarding him with an air of unflinching, steady displeasure, "if you ask my candid opinion, that the situation is one which will not bear a *much* greater strain upon it."

"You are trying to put me in the wrong," he says, galled past speaking by the frigid superiority of her tone; "but you know as well as I do that this is not the first time by many that I have been reluctantly compelled to reason with you. I do you the justice to say that I believe your intention is harmless."

"You are very good to admit even so much," she replies, with an ironical bow, and an intentionally exasperating smile.

"But the world does not see the intention," pursues he, trying not to heed her—trying to resist the infuriation bred in his vexed soul by her voice and eyes—"the world sees only the outward actions, and yours are—"

"You had better not finish your sentence," she cries, dropping her sarcastic tone, and breaking out into unveiled indignation, as she walks hastily to the door; then turns, and, with a parting glare at him: "Let us each keep to our opinion of the other. I, for my part, shall always think that you have

greatly exceeded your office; and you, if you please, may continue to believe that I am ignorant and unmindful of the commonest rules of decorum."

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW morning is born, fresh and brave even here in London. Neither of these adjectives apply to the condition of Miss Latimer. A night of restlessness and repentance has been followed by a morning of langour and resentment. In the night, it is our sins against others that have the greatest prominence in our minds; when morning dawns, their misdeeds against us assert their sway.

Incapable of occupation, averse from the wholesome sunlight, unstrung and ill-humored, she lies on a couch in her own sitting-room, with rose blinds lowered, as great a contrast to the stirring, healthy Gillian of every-day life as can well be imagined. Nor has a lengthy visit from the younger Tarlton sister at all contributed to restore her amiability. Against the prerogatives of their old established intimacy she has long revolted in spirit; but never have they excited such rebellion in her mind as on the present occasion.

She has received the excuses of Anne for her yesterday's breach of faith—excuses which begin and end apparently in her having started game of her own—with glacial coldness. She has twice withdrawn her hand from being fondled; she has three times complained of headache; and at length it has dawned upon the not very acute perceptions of her companion that something is gravely amiss.

"Why, you are really vexed, I see," she says, an expression of genuine, if shallow, regret clouding the insignificant prettiness of her face; "I am sure you need not be. As to the

impropriety"—with a consoling accent—"what was it in comparison of Sophia's?"

"Sophia is nothing to me," replies Gillian, irritably, beginning to pull to pieces a spray of lily of the valley that stands in a glass at her elbow, ruthlessly and quite unconsciously breaking off each little odorous bell. "I can not make her conduct the rule of mine."

"I wonder what they talked about," pursues Anne, her frivolous mind flying off at a tangent from her own offense and Gillian's wrongs. "I should not have an idea what subjects to choose with a man of that class. I tried to persuade her to tell me, but she only bridled and looked wise."

Gillian's lily lies in little shreds in her lap; that is her only rejoinder.

"Of course, he is not quite in our own rank of life," pursues Anne, in happy unconsciousness, leaning back in her chair, and smelling a rose; "and I dare say you will laugh at me for saying so, but I declare I think he is too good for her."

However, even Anne's consolations and speculations come to an end at last, though they leave her friend in sensibly worse case of mind and body than they found her.

It is one of Gillian's now weekly days for visiting the hospital. Never in her life has she felt less inclined for even the modified form of good works involved in sitting by a clean bed in an airy room, reading aloud a moral story-book to attentive and interested listeners. But she conquers her disinclination, or, to speak more accurately, does not allow it to influence her actions; and at the usual hour sets off, her brougham filled with the early summer flowers that have come in such welcome plenty.

All the long way through the streets to Lincoln's Inn Fields she lies back, staring dully out in dejected ill-humor. It is not till the hospital's great dark bulk rises before her that she begins to rouse herself.

And yet, as two minutes later she passes down the long wards, through whose high windows the May wind is freely blowing, her hands full of gueldres roses, and in friendly talk with a still-faced sister, whose dark blue dress proclaims her to belong to that higher grade of sisterhood, which has devoted its whole life to the work—in contradistinction to the gray sisters, who come in for only six or nine months at a time—you would not say that much could ail the soul that dwelt in that blooming body.

She does not stop till she reaches the pink and white dimity-draped cots, and the great rocking-horse, prancing in eternal gallop, that announces the children's ward. All still and good they lie. There is not one sound of crying or wailing, though of several it has to be said with a pitying sigh that they can never be better; and yet even these doomed ones, for the most part, look at rest and happy.

One sad-faced boy, indeed, lies back, with eyes half closed, heavily breathing. He is only six years old. His parents hired him out to acrobats, who have twisted and wrenched his poor little frame, till now that compassionate death has called him away from them.

One small soul is sitting up in bed, bright and cheerful, in a sort of strait-waiscoat of plaster-of-Paris. Here is a bad case of curvature of the spine, and if she were not in this odd panoply, would have to be always lying on her face.

Another tiny creature has lately had her leg cut off. She is staring round-eyed at the stranger, forgetting for the moment the clover-head that is grasped in her baby hand, and the daisies strewn over her small counterpane.

Over another bed they see a man, whose back is turned toward them, stooping; a man dressed in all the severity of medical black. As they have approached him before he is aware, they are able to discover the nature of his occupation. It is no feeling of pulse nor asking for symptoms. His is a more arduous employ than either. He is trying to set on their

legs the rickety inmates of a Noah's ark. Even when he perceives them he does not leave off. Perhaps he is glad of the excuse for keeping his face bent and partially hidden. They have not met since that last and worst quarrel of theirs overnight.

Gillian has not at all made up her mind as to how, or in what spirit, she shall greet him or receive his greeting, if he gives her any, nor has by any means expected to be so soon and suddenly called upon for a decision.

The sister is called away, and Miss Latimer remains standing irresolute and in silence beside the cot, watching his evolutions, in which she by and by becomes herself absorbingly interested.

Presently he looks up at her with a rather awkward smile, and says:

"Shem will stand, and Ham will stand, but Japhet will not stand."

As he speaks, he raises himself to his feet and stands beside her, Japhet in one hand, and a hyæna in the other. An answering smile breaks like morning light over her face.

"I will make them *all* stand, she cries, resolutely, kneeling down; "not only them but their wives. I will set the whole of creation on its legs, or die in the attempt."

No further word is spoken until this feat is accomplished. When the whole of the beasts, both clean and unclean, are promenading in pairs across the quilt, she looks up radiant; then, with a sudden impulse:

"We are friends?" she says, half stretching out her hand; and then, in a sudden remembrance of his never having clasped it, drawing it back.

"That is for you to decide," he answers, with emotion.

She is silent a moment, still kneeling, her look lifted to the sunbeams streaming in at the high windows, and a tender warmth about her heart.

"I wish we did not quarrel so much," she says, presently, very softly; "it is disagreeable to quarrel."

"But it is pleasant to make friends again," he says, in a hurried, low voice, as if the words were forced out of him against his will.

She makes no rejoinder; only she still kneels, still looks at the sunbeam, a sudden splendid joy making her proud eyes moist. When next she looks round, he is gone.

CHAPTER X.

THE season has nearly run its length; only its sultry fag-end is left. The streets have their suffocating August smell of hot pavement and worn-out air. Every day greater numbers of laden cabs set toward the railway stations; toward every point of the compass the great city is emptying out her children.

It is the first of August, the day on which Gillian Latimer attains her twenty-first birthday, and comes into absolutely unfettered, unguardianed, untrusteed possession of her two hundred thousand pounds. The five months, the twenty-five weeks, the hundred and seventy-days, that in prospect she had called eternal, are now proved to have been but a very little parcel of Time's great whole. Not that to her they have gone quickly. The rapidity or slowness with which any portion of our lives passes, has, whatever the popular belief may say to the contrary, no proportion to the happiness or unhappiness of that period. A time of full and varied occupation seems, in retrospect, long, however pleasant; and a time of monotonous leisure seems short, however painful.

Of leisure, Gillian had certainly had, of late, none. Pleasure and business have successfully combined to rob her of it.

Whether they have given her much enjoyment in its place, she is often inclined to doubt.

This morning she has risen early, for the journey up to north-country Marlowe, which is before her, is long, and it is to be preceded by a farewell interview with her guardian.

As she sits, coolly wrapped in a white *peignoir*, by her window, with undressed hair blown back by the wind, that even at this early hour is hot and sick, looking out with sad leave-taking eyes on the still drowsy town, she is running over in her mind the incidents of the past month, separating their good from their bad, sifting their chaff from their wheat.

In this moment of depression, the chaff seems to have predominated. She no longer seeks to disguise from herself what it is that in her appraisement causes one moment to be reckoned as weighty grain, and another as light husk. On some fair minutes, indeed, she can look back, that even now, in the thinking on them, make her smile; minutes when, at a sudden flash, his eyes and heart and understanding seem to stand face to face with and embrace hers.

But they were only minutes, followed by hours of painstakingly increased coldness; days of separation; half-hours of unkind and unchristian bickering; while on her side, through all the woof of her life, there has run a weary thread of growing jealousy that has disfigured and marred all its texture. To the task of freeing herself insensibly from the yoke of the Tarlton intimacy, she has, in all these months, proved herself wholly unequal.

Now, on this first of August, she is, much against her will, far further advanced in their confidence, far more liable to their caresses, than she was five months ago. She has been the vainly restive recipient of Anne's plaints about a succession of unfortunate, and—if you credit her sister's eager testimony—wholly one-sided attachments; also the depository of her speculations as to Sophia's prospects.

"Do you think that father will ever give his consent?" she

asks one day, after having been for half an hour stretching Miss Latimer on the rack of her conjectures and hopes; "not," with a laugh, "that I am at all sure that he will ever be asked for it. Of couse, if it were I, he would not hear of it; but then, I have always been his favorite. Perhaps he may be glad of any opportunity of establishing Sophia; you know," with anxious emphasis, "that it is the first she has ever had."

"So you have told me several times," replies Gillian, irritably.

Her tone closes the conversation, and rids her for the time of her gadfly; but only that her thoughts may wearily run undisturbed in the track into which Anne vainly imagines she has with difficulty, and for the moment, turned them. And it is thus, in this condition of unrest and uncertainty, of cold, strong doubt and pale, weak hope, that, on this sultry morning, she is leaving the matter on which of late it has seemed that her very being, all her strong young life, has come to hinge.

The almanac no longer hangs before the bed; but that is not because it has served its purpose, and that the tale of the days it was meant to mark is now full. Weeks ago it was pulled down, angrily torn to shreds, and consigned to the waste-paper basket.

All through the trivial daily round of yesterday, she has kept saying, "It is the last time." She caught herself saying it with pathos even ot Miss Burnet's sniff, to which she silently listened last night, as that lady lay after dinner in her arm-chair by the window, looking out in drowsy content on the passing cabs and carriages.

She was even constrained to give utterance to her melancholy little formula, when, according to her now invariable custom of spending the evening at home, she poured out and carefully carried to her hostess her cup of tea.

"It is the last time," she says, in a choked voice.

"So it is," replies the other, phlegmatically.

This is not much of an encouragement toward pursuing the conversation in a vein of sentiment, and Gillian's pensive generality as to the painfulness of last times is still hovering unspoken on her lips, when Miss Burnet's next speech kept it for ever unsaid.

"Dear me," she says, matter-of-factly, looking out at the glooming street, "only the 31st of July, and how the evenings are beginning to draw in already!"

There is a silence of ten minutes; the room grows darker, and the girl's heart fuller. By and by her pent feelings must have their way in speech. Were she alone, she would cry aloud to herself or to the chairs and tables. It is perhaps with as little hope of a return that she now addresses herself to Miss Burnet.

"I wonder, she says, in a half choked voice, "whether I shall ever in future see anything of you both?"

"You will see plenty of me, if you choose," replies the elder woman, with stolid common sense. "As you know, I am not much of a gad-about; I am generally to be found, if any one takes the trouble to look for me. As to John, I do not suppose that you will see much more of him, but that," with a dry laugh, "will not break either of your hearts, I imagine."

To her departure her guardian himself has not alluded more than three times in all; and on neither of those occasions has the mention of it been attended by any overt expressions of regret.

Once, indeed, when in one of their moments of amity he was planning in the future some small joint action for them two, he has pulled himself up suddenly, and said:

"But you will not be here then."

Her ear, attentively listening, has thought that it caught the shadow of a sigh; but afterward she convinces herself that she was mistaken. Well, he will have to allude to it now at all events, for the moment for their final interview—the interview

at which he is to give up into her own hands, now legally capable of taking it, the charge of her own person and property—has arrived.

At half-past eight she knocks at the door of his consulting room. The house and church clocks strike as she enters. With a feeling that is half of relief and half a pang, it occurs to her that this last talk of theirs can not be prolonged beyond half an hour, as at nine he must begin to see his patients.

He is sitting at his table, apparently unoccupied, and rises at her approach. It is a paler, calmer Gillian that now meets his eye than the one, flushed with dire confusion at Miss Burnet's malapropos queries, whom five months ago he had coldly welcomed to his hearth. Careful washing and bathing have removed the red traces of tears from her grave eyes; but no washing can bring back the bright blood that weeping, watching, and an aching heart have—at least for the time—wholly abolished from her smooth cheeks. She does not look nearly so handsome as usual to-day, and perhaps that is what he is thinking as he stands for a moment or two silently opposite her.

"I must wish you many happy returns of your birthday," he says, at last, in a low voice; "believe me, I do it heartily."

She had not expected so kind a greeting; she had strung herself up to the giving a quiet attention to dry business details; but the touch of feeling in his tone goes nigh to undo her.

"Do not wish me too many!" she says, with a nervous laugh. "How do I know of what kind they may be?"

Perhaps their souls are sufficiently in tune for him to feel how slight a trifle it would take to overset her difficult composure, for he turns hastily to the table, and begins to speak in a quick, matter-of-fact business voice.

"You will find in this tin box, with your initials on it, all the different securities in which your money is invested, and which I have transferred into your own name. There are the stock receipts for the money in the Consols; the debentures of the L. and N. W., and the scrip of the Lancashire and Yorkshire, Great Northern and Midland shares; the mortgage deeds and title-deeds of Lord Brentwood's estate, in which most of your remaining money is invested."

His dry practical tone gives her back her nearly lost mastery over herself, and she follows him with intelligence and composure. He does not detain her attention long. All the main part of the necessary business has been transacted beforehand with her lawyer. It is only for a few last words of explanation and counsel, for a final formal delivery into her own hands of the government of her life, that he has sought this last interview.

And now it is ended; at least the business part is. Nothing remains but for the once enemies to say farewell. And how is that to be done? Is she to leave his house, ushered out by that same cold bow of utter unfriendliness with which he received her into it? At least, she can not part from him without giving utterance to the little valedictory speech that she has been painfully conning all through the watches of the sleepless night.

"I must not go," she says, still standing by the table, on which her trembling fingers rest, "without thanking you for the way in which you have performed the painful task that you so conscientiously undertook, without asking you to forgive me for the elements of discomfort that my presence—and my self-will, and—and—my want of judgment—and—and—my—my unfortunate temper have introduced into your life."

She has begun glibly enough, if with some effort; but toward the end the choking sobs, against which she is vainly fighting, render her almost unintelligible. Perhaps neither to

him is speech at this moment very easy, for if the gesture that he makes of mute but eager disclaimer and prohibition be no answer, he gives her none.

"I know," she pursues falteringly, "that my failings are the very ones that jar most upon you; often," with a faint smile, "you have been at the end of your patience with me. I am glad, for your sake, that the strain is now ended."

"Be glad for yourself, too," he answers low and hurriedly; "I am sure you have good reason to be."

Her head sinks down on her breast.

"For myself I am not glad," she answers, almost inaudibly.

For a moment he looks at her strangely, and makes a sudden gesture, as of one that would stretch out his arms; his face is very white, and his features suffering and drawn. At least such is her momentary impression, for, before she can verify it he has turned his back upon her, and is looking out in dead silence on the sultry street.

"Now that I am going away," she continues by and by, when her throbbing heart allows her to speak coherently, "I have a small favor to ask of you; perhaps you are not aware that you have never shaken hands with me. Possibly it has been accident on your part; even if it were intentional, I have no right to resent it; but now that—I am—going—away—for ever—now that—the end of our unhappy relations has come, I should be glad if you could bring yourself to give me this proof of pardon and good-will."

At the meaning of her last clause he must needs arrive by guessing, for it is so strangled by unconquerable tears as to be a mere senseless murmur. As the sound of her voice ceases he turns slowly, and as if with intense reluctance, again to face her.

She is still standing by the table as when he left her; only that now the tears are racing unchecked down her cheeks, her lips quiver piteously, and she is timidly holding out to him the small, fair hand, of which she has just made him the depre-

cating offer. He takes it in both his, and looking at her for one full moment with an intense wistfulness, he stoops his head, and reverently kisses it.

"God bless you, dear!" he says, brokenly—"God Almighty bless you!"

And so turns suddenly away and leaves her.

PART III.—SECOND THOUGHTS ARE BEST.

CHAPTER I.

Even in the blessing her he goes, and that benediction has an accent of resolute farewell and renunciation that, all through the long suceeeding day's travel, chills the heart that the suddenly trembling voice and the kind words had made leap.

She does not see him again before her departure, nor are her adieux to Miss Burnet worthy of the name. What little pathos there might have been in them is entirely destroyed by the parrot, who takes it into his malignant gray head to go through all his worst whoops and yells while they are taking place, and thus sensibly to abbreviate them.

No one comes to the door to see her off, to send good-by smiles after her, and she rolls away as ungreeted as she had arrived. All through the day, or at least the greater part of it, she travels, travels along.

Greatly to her maid's surprise, she relegates her to a different railway carriage from that occupied by herself, the prospect of having that respectful spy covertly observing her emotions through five or six long hours being more than she can face. How employed—by what eager thoughts—ravaged by what sharp fears—wet by what salt drops those dusty hours pass—who shall say?

At all events it is a calmly smiling, presentable Gillian that, as the splendid summer day droops toward its sumptuous

close, steps out of the train on the platform of that very north-country station of Carnforth, which she had last trodden on the stinging January night on which her whole destiny now seems to have turned. Whatever carking cares, pricking regrets, and uneasy hopes may have filled the first hours of her journey, at least in the last the pleasure of home-coming has been predominant. Almost before the station was in sight, her head has been out of window trying to distinguish which of the dear little flock, whose tutelar angel she is now again going to become, is awaiting her with eager tenderness.

As the train slackens speed, her eye expectantly seeks among the vehicles gathered outside her own ponies and pony-carriage, which she had confidently requested might be sent to meet her. She fails to find them; but no doubt they are hidden behind some bulky omnibus or intervening fly. Nor does she at first see any figure on the platform that strikes her as familiar. Her eye passes, carelessly at first, indeed, over a showy-looking young lady pacing up and down with a rather swaggering air; nor is it till she has vainly examined every other form and face that her glance casually alights again on the one first dismissed as unrecognized; alights to discover that the swaggering young lady is none other than Jane—Jane shot up, dressed up, grown up!

For the first moment the shock of this metamorphosis strikes her dumb; the metamorphosis that, in six brief months, has transformed a leggy tom-boy with short petticoats and pig-tail hair, into a self-conscious, modish woman of the world. Nor, when she recovers speech, is her greeting such as she had planned it should be.

"Why child," in a shocked voice, "what a hat!"

"I am sorry you do not like it," replies Jane, pertly; "but one can not please everybody."

Gillian does not, for the moment, make any rejoinder. In a jarred silence she makes her way beside her cousin to the door of exit. Just before reaching it:

"Uncle Marlowe has not come to meet me?" she says, in a subdued voice of disappointment.

"He said something about it," replies Jane, carelessly; "but I persuaded him not to come. You know that he has no command over his feelings, and I thought that he might very likely make a scene at the station."

They have issued into the open air, and again Gillian's eyes seek expectently the bay ponies with black points, which again they fail to find. Instead of them a garish little equippage, drawn by a pair of piebald cobs, with florid harness overdone with brass ornaments, bells round their necks, and roses at their ears, stops the way.

"I—I—do not understand," says Miss Latimer, in a bewildered voice. "What has become of my ponies?"

"They are sold," replies Jane; "I hope you do not mind; but they were such humdrum old things, that it was no fun driving them. I persuaded papa to buy me these instead."

Gillian has changed color sensibly.

"Do they jump through hoops?" she asks in a withering voice.

To this ironical query Jane does not think it necessary to respond.

"I hope you will excuse my getting in first," she says, putting her foot on the step, "as I am to drive."

"Can you drive?" asks Gillian, in a rather doubtful voice; "had not you better let me?"

"*Can I drive!*" repeats the other, with a toss of her head. "My dear Gil, forgive my laughing!"

In this pleasant frame of mind, they set off. The ponies are fresh, and pull a good deal; and for the first mile Gillian's attention is wholly occupied in distrustfully watching her companion's management of them; but at the end of that time, having satisfied herself that Jane's wrists are strong and that she has them well in hand, her thoughts, which the wholly unexpected turn taken by the incidents of the last half-hour have

sent wool-gathering, begins to range themselves into some order.

Is this really she, sitting snubbed and secondary, in this gaudy pony-chaise? Is this really Jane—gawky, romping, but thoroughly be-mastered Jane—this off-hand young woman, with rakish get up and *dégagé* mien, patronising her from a box-seat? She looks round with a sort of gasp. Shall she find everything—the whole face of nature—equally changed? Will the gentle hills have swelled to Himalayas, and the green meadows turned to torrid deserts?

She feels as if it would not much surprise her if they had. But, no! at least the country is the same—the same dear northerly country of fells and becks, whose cool memory has often come back quickeningly to her in breathless London nights.

Clear of clouds stands out against Ingleboro the faint daffodil color of the evening sky. He has shaken off the vapors that often fold his ancient head, to look on her in undimmed welcome. Even from here, though far off, she can clearly see on his brother's pale slopes the wealthy flush of the amethyst heather. The country of grey-stone walls, of parky dells, kept green and fresh by constant rains, of little leaping brooks, and numberless vigorous ash-trees—thank God! at least it is in nothing changed!

The sight of the gracious country on which her childhood and her youth were fed, so sweetly soothes and softens her heart and temper that by and by she is able to turn with recovered equanimity to her defiant companion. After all, the main things—the things that matter—are the same as they ever were. In her absence a few trifles have gone wrong, which, with tact and firmness may soon be set right again.

But, in these first moments of her home-coming, let fault-finding be in abeyance. So thinking, she speaks, with a pleasant and conciliatory smile.

"I see, Jane, that I was wrong to doubt your powers.

Since I went, you have made wonderful progress in your driving."

"Have I?" replies Jane, nonchalantly; "I suppose so. In six months one makes great progress in many directions."

There is something namelessly irritating to Miss Latimer in the tone in which this is said, and it is a moment or two before she can conquer the impression enough to say in the same friendly, if rather condescending key:

"Indeed, I am glad to hear it. Do you mean to say that I shall find that you have made equally great strides in your lessons?"

"*Lessons!*" repeats Jane, with contempt; "do you suppose that I have any time for them now? When I had to take your place, of course I was obliged to devote myself entirely to papa. What with him, and the management of the house, and so forth, I really have not a moment that I can call my own."

There is such an importance in the way in which this is said, that, were it not for extreme vexation, Gillian could find it in her heart to laugh. After all, it is the same statement, in almost the identical words, which she herself has often made in old times; but how differently it seems to her that it must have sounded in her mouth.

"And Emilia," she says, by and by, with an accent of quiet sarcasm, "is her education completed too?"

"I am trying to persuade papa to send Emilia to school," replies Jane, gravely. "It would do her all the good in the world; and, as I tell him, I really can not be worried with any more resident governesses."

"And does it never occur to you to accompany her?" asks Gillian, the sarcasm in her voice becoming, in despite of her late peaceful resolves, more patent than before.

"*I!*" replies Jane, with rising color, "and what would become of papa, pray? Poor dear! Do you think that any earthly consideration would induce me to desert him?"

After this flight of filial tenderness there is silence almost unbroken, until the circus ponies draw up with a whisk and a final jingle of their bells at the door of the solid gray house, that—built of the stone of the country, plain, yet stately—is known through the country side as Marlowe Hall. At the house-door stands a stout figure, of whom no sooner is Gillian aware than she precipitates herself out of her Cinderella coach, and throws two eager arms round his short neck.

"So you see that you have got me back!" she cries, with something between a laugh and a sob.

"Are you glad? At least you are glad?"

"Of course I am glad," replies the Squire, as distinctly as her embrace will allow him. "We are all glad; are not we, Jenny?"

There is no doubt that he means what he says; but, even while her arms are around him, she feels that he is looking apprehensively over her shoulder—that there is a tone of deprecation and appeal in his voice.

"We are all glad, eh, Jenny?" he repeats a second time; but Miss Jane is standing by her ponies, and giving some imperious order about them to her small groom.

Whether or not she hears her father's question, she certainly does not answer it. Gillian's arms drop to her sides. With a feeling of utter blank disappointment, she turns to enter the house.

"I think I will go to my room at once," she says, in a low voice, making toward the familiar staircase; "I shall be glad to rest."

"Perhaps I had better show you which it is," cries Jane, officiously, and following her quickly. "I hope you will not mind, but I now have the one you used to occupy; papa likes to have me near him."

"And I am turned out!" says Gillian, standing stock still half way up the stairs, in a voice in which astonishment and anger struggled for the mastery.

"I am sorry you are annoyed," replies Jane, glibly, and in a tone from which sorrow is conspicuously absent; "but, of course, I had to please papa."

Without another word—for what word is competent to express her feelings—Miss Latimer pursues her upward journey, and mutely submits to being shown into one of the guest-chambers into which she has so often ushered a two-days' guest, and to being left there with the same civil wish that she has often expressed to such a guest that she may find it comfortable. Dinner has been announced full five minutes before Gillian, once conspicuous for punctuality, appears in the drawing-room. Perhaps it has taken her all the time spent by her in her bedroom to get her features and her complexion into society trim again, nor has she been markedly successful even now.

"Rested, Gill?" says the Squire, in a voice of anxious conciliation, looking nervously from the lowering brow of one of his young friends to the undaunted front of the other; "ready for dinner I dare say? Come along." So saying, he gives her his arm.

As they enter the dining-room, Gillian is aware that Jane has pushed hastily past them, and hurried to place herself at the head of the table. Unprepared for this last blow, Gillian stands a moment, irresolute and stunned; then, finding that her uncle is regarding her with an expression little short of terror to see how she takes this fresh innovation, she sinks supinely into the guest's seat at the side of the table, and the victory remains with Jane. It is some time before any one makes a remark. At length Gillian, pointedly addressing the question to the Squire, asks, stiffly:

"Where is Emilia? where is Dick? Am I not to be allowed to see them?"

"You will find Emilia in the drawing-room," answers Jane thrusting in her answer before her father has time to frame one. "As to Dick, he is in disgrace; I have sent him to bed,"

"And may I ask what his offense was?" says Gillian, with a frost-bound look at her cousin.

"He was impertinent to me," replies Jane, with dignity. "Papa never allows him to be impertinent to me; do you, papa;"

"He never used to be impertinent," rejoins Gillian, in a low voice.

"Had you much dust, Gill? many flies?" cries the Squire, rushing in at this point with eager irrelevancy.

She answers coldly and gently, and again there is silence.

Dinner is over now, and so is the evening, and in the unfamiliar bedroom Gillian stands by the open window, looking out from the unfamiliar point of view at the friendly, starlit fells.

"I am as unwelcome here as I was unregretted there!" she says to herself aloud, in a heart-broken voice. "What good shall my life do me?"

CHAPTER II.

THIS is, of course, a night mood, drawing exaggerated blackness from the kindred dark. When light's morning sea washes joyously over the world, some of its waves roll over the heart of the girl, to whom, over night, all had seemed gloom. To her saner, daylight mind, the disappointments and mortifications attendant on her arrival seem to have been magnified by her beyond their due. By the time she had finished dressing —so powerfully and sanguinely do the sunshine and the fresh country breeze blowing in at her window act upon her healthy frame—she is far from despairing, ere the week is out, of resuming her occupation of her room, and her leadership of the table. Nor, during the first hour or so of her joining the family party, does much happen to disturb this cheerful dispo-

sition. It is true that, on coming down, she has found Jane firmly established behind the tea-urn, and that, during the whole breakfast, that young person is so ostentatiously occupied by the offices of filial piety as to be hardly able to answer when she is addressed.

But, on the other hand, Emilia, whom, after all, she did not see last night—Emilia, with her petticoats up to her knees, and her flax pig-tails hanging long and tight down her back as of yore—the very sight refreshes her—has bounced rapturously into her arms; followed with every symptom of extravagant joy by Dick. And though, in the case of the latter, it by and by strikes her that he is less docile than he used to be, that he has even contracted one or two rude and awkward tricks, yet, as he tells her many times how glad he is that she is at home again, and how much better he likes her than Jane, she can not find it in her heart to be hypercritical as to the details of his behavior. He would have liked, and she would have liked, that he should accompany her when, by and by, she walks down into the little town at the hill-foot; but this is imperiously vetoed by Jane, by whom he is dragged off to his lessons; slapping the hand that leads him, pulling back with all his little angry force, and calling her many naughty names, of which it strikes Gillian that he has a larger repertory than he had six months ago.

"You have not a good method with him, Jane," she says, in that tone of calm severity which she had formerly found so invaluable a weapon in the management of her little kingdom. But the spell has lost its power.

"Don't you think so?" replies Jane, coldly. "I do what I think is right, and at all events I succeed in pleasing papa."

So saying, she disappears; not, however, without adding an important explanation that it is her household duties that call her away. And Gillian waits long and vainly to be summoned to one of those formerly invariable morning conferences in his study, in which she was went to make up her uncle's mind for

him on any point that might require decision, and generally lay down the lines of his conduct through the day. At length, obliged to own that this habit also is broken, this law repealed, she takes hat and sunshade, and strolls down alone and half-bewildered to the small gray town.

As she walks along between the weather-stained limestone walls, colonized as of yore by the families of the tiny ferns, and painted by the lichen's tints; with the crisp breath of the fells in her face, her spirits again begin to rise. Though thwarting and disappointment have met her indoors, she will at least find indemnification and consolation in the town; in the contemplation of the little charitable institutions of her own creating and maintaining, which she had left so flourishing; the Temperance-room, so excellently guided that people setting up like ones in neighbor parishes had come from afar to see and take pattern by it; the baby-school, where prodigies in the way of patchwork quilts, confected by fingers of three and four years, were wont to be exhibited to the wondering eyes of admiring visitors; the baby-school, for which she had begged a cottage from the Squire, and at whose head she had placed a gentle, motherly widow, warranted not to overdrive the small scholars. But, alas! even here discomfiture awaits her. On reaching the cottage she finds that the motherly widow has remarried; the school is broken up, and the infants returned upon their families' hands, their accomplishments forgotten, and their education suspended until the School Board shall take them in hand. Shocked and deeply chafed, she turns away, and continues her walk, though with a less elastic step, through the town. It is market day, and at the doors of all the public-houses stands knots of farmers. At sight of them an apprehension, to which she does not even yet give willing entrance, makes her quicken her pace, and brings her in a very few minutes to the door of the Temperance-room. She tries it; it is locked; through the unshuttered window she looks into the interior. There is absolutely no signs of occupation;

none of the usual market-day preparations of cups and loaves, and cocoa and teapots. Angry and aghast, she turns away, and and by hastily questioning every passer-by, finds—though with some difficulty, for she has changed her place of abode—the woman whom, when she went away, she left in charge, and from her discovers that by Jane's orders it has now been for more than two months closed.

"If you please, 'm, Miss Marlowe should say as she had not the time to attend to it, and that the people would prize it more if they did not think as they could always make sure of it, and so one day she left word as it was to be closed till further orders."

"Did she, indeed?" replies Gillian, with flaming face and flashing eyes. "Well, then, *I* give orders that it is to be re-opened at once. Please go this moment, and begin to light the fire, and boil the kettles."

To so peremptory a command, neither man nor mouse in Marlowe would six months ago have ventured to pay anything but an eager and hasty obedience. It is the measure to Gillian of the extent to which her authority has drooped, that her subordinate still demurs.

"I believe, 'm," she says, respectfully but not acquiescently, "that Miss Marlowe did not think of opening it again before winter."

A deeper-dyed wave of rich color than that which already tinges them, rushes headlong into Miss Latimer's cheeks.

"Whatever Miss Marlowe thinks, or does not think; says, or does not say," she cries masterfully, tapping her foot with ireful emphasis on the tiled floor of the subject of contention, into which they had now entered, "I say that it is to be reopened now; this minute; and I expect to be obeyed at once, please, —*at once!*"

It is not for some moments—so hot is the fire of her uncalculating zeal—that Gillian can be brought to admit that what she commands is, for the moment at least, an impossibility

that, owing to the absolute necessity of giving a thorough cleaning to a room so long disused, thanks also to the entire absence of preparation and destitution of the necessary provisions, the accomplishment of her will must be postponed to next market-day, and that, for this one, the public-houses must remain in undisputed possession of their prey. Having at length reluctantly given admittance to this conviction, having delivered oft-repeated final injunctions as to the reëstablishment on the old footing of her wrecked scheme, and setting on its legs again of her fallen hobby, she turns to retrace her steps homeward.

It is hotter going up the hill than it was coming down; the breeze no longer cools her, and she does not even see the fells. Feeling that to meet Jane in her present mood is the one thing by all means to be avoided, she strolls languidly along the raised terrace that dominates the approach, and seating herself on the low gray wall, begins idly to watch the short-horns in the park pull down the tree-boughs, and eat the leaves. The spiced petunias are giving out their potent perfume in the morning air. All the smells and sights of the blessed country are as good as —better than—she had remembered them; but yet to them all her senses seem shut. It is a day—one of the very few that come to us—of improbable splendor. Great, brilliant clouds that mean nothing less than rain, slowly sailing through sapphire wastes; pastures where the aftermath is so fresh and bright as to make you wink; Ingleboro lifting his high head clean above his brothers, and on his and their long flanks each patch of royal-colored heather, each fir plantation, each gray limestone shoulder, each slope of fine turf, seen plainly as heart could wish in the glory of the settled sunshine. But Gillian is as one that sits at a feast without being able to taste it. By and by she is aware of a solid foot crunching the gravel in drawing near to her; a foot that stays its step beside her. She does not immediately look round with a welcoming smile as she would have done of yore, but keeps her head turned toward where in the valley the fair Lune River runs.

"Well, Gill?" in a rather nervous voice.

"Well, dear?" very gravely.

"The fells are looking well, are not they?"

"Yes," she answers, now turning round her face fully toward him—a face ornamented by a bitter, curling smile. "I am only surprised that they are not standing on their heads; that they have not turned topsy-turvy, like everything else here."

To this suave pleasantry the Squire makes no answer, unless an expression of hopeless perplexity, a futile pushing about of little pebbles with the point of his stick, a covert glance over his own shoulder, as with some vague idea of escape, may be called one.

Perhaps Miss Latimer divines that this notion of evasion exists in his mind, for she rises with dignity, and saying, "I am glad that you have given me this opportunity; I have been wishing to speak to you," puts her hand decidedly through his arm, and leads him away captive among the flower beds.

It is a lovely, desultory garden, hilly and irregular; unlike Timon's, where

> "Grove nods to grove, each alley has its brother,
> And half the platform justs reflects the other."

Here nothing answers to anything else, but there is everywhere a rule-defying jumble of blossoms and boughs—clumps of glossy laurels, flights of rustic steps, long rose-beds, where Lancaster's red rose blows predominant; and at the very bottom a shallow beck trips in unending laughter along.

By the side of the beck stands a rustic seat, and on this seat Gillian resolutely establishes her uncle, and plants herself, with an air of determination that chills the marrow of his bones, beside him

"I am sure I do not wish to reproach you, dear," she begins in a voice that she sincerely tries to make one of dispassionate candor and justice; but I think that before you allowed me to return you should have given me some idea of the entire

revolution that you have made in your household since I left you."

"But I have not!" cries the Squire, in anxious disclaimer. "I assure you, Gill, that you are mistaken; I am sure I do not know how things have come about, but I assure you that *I* have done nothing."

"As long ago as at the time of my father's death," continues Gillian, impressively, "I remember your telling me that you thought you saw, as you phrased it, 'an inclination on the part of my team to kick over the traces.' Well, dear, I can only tell you now"—with an accent of austere composure—"that unless I am very ably seconded and vigorously backed by you, I shall have to give up the attempt at driving them at all."

Awed by this threat, though perhaps to his own secret soul he may confess that it does not convey to him the impression of utter ruin that it would have done a twelve month ago, the Squire stares hopelessly at the beck. Tall forest trees overshadow it, now and then dropping a leaf on its brown breast. Water-flies dance and airily skim it; here a tiny waterfall slides over mossed stones, and there Emilia and Dick have made a mimic dam to stem and fret it in its gay course; but through the piled sticks and stones it tinkles and trickles away, and sets them at naught.

"I am sure," he says, in an uncertain voice, "that it is the last thing I should wish; but—but—I give you my word of honor, I do not see my way to helping it."

"If you ask my advice," cries his niece, eagerly—he is certainly innocent of having done so—"if you think my opinion worth having, I have no hesitation in recommending you to send Jane to a good school immediately; you have allowed her"—with an accent of dignified reproach—"to get completely beyond the control of any governess, so school is the only alternative."

The Squire shakes his head.

"She would not go."

"Would not go!" repeats Gillian, angrily, darting a contemptuous glance at the poor gentleman beside her. "You must be joking! A child of that age!"

"She is not so *very* young, you know," replies the Squire, in faint demurrer; "sixteen this month, and she tells me she is always taken for eighteen."

"And you always take everything she says *au pied de la lettre?*" says Gillian, with an *aigre doux* smile. "It really is a sin and a shame to impose upon any one who is as easily taken in as you are; it is like robbing a nest."

But it seems that he holds, with a tenacity to which her experience of him affords no parallel, to his idea.

"She is old for her age," he says, almost persistently. "She is a girl with a great deal of character; knows her own mind, and thinks for herself. Do you know, Gill"—with a deprecating smile, putting his hand on her shoulder—"do you know, Gill, that she often reminds me of you?"

"Of *me!*" cries Miss Latimer, giving a great start, and with an accent of the most profound astonishment and displeasure; "does she indeed?"

It is not often, perhaps, in the course of our lives that an absolutely new idea presents itself to our minds—an idea of which we have had neither hint nor inkling beforehand—but such is now Gillian's case. The notion, timidly hazarded by the Squire, has the effect of reducing to a stupified silence his voluble niece. Is it possible that the very qualities which have been rendering Jane so odious in her eyes—the insolent self-assertion; the deep-laid, high-spoken confidence in her own, and contempt for others' judgment; the rude and selfish snatching at power, and veiling it under a thin mask of filial duty—that these very qualities are but reflected from herself; that, as Jane now appears to her, so has she been appearing all these years to other people? Now that she comes to look at it, there is a horrible likelihood in the idea. Just as her mind has fully grasped the horror and also the probability of this

resemblance—a resemblance which may very possibly extend to physical as well as moral qualities, for are not they both tall and well-grown?—Miss Jane herself appears in sight—appears stepping along with her now usual swaggering air, holding her head aloft, and humming a tune.

"Where *have* you been hiding yourself, dear?" she says, addressing her father in a tone of indulgent, but distinct reproof. "I have been hunting for you high and low."

"Have you indeed, Jenny?" replies the Squire, with a good-humored but not very easy-minded smile; "you see, Gill and I have been having a chat."

"I am sorry to disturb you," rejoins Jane, in an important voice, "but I am afraid that I must carry you off now, as there is some business on which I must speak to you at once."

"Is it something that I am not to hear?" asks Gillian, with slow incisiveness, lifting a cutting look to her cousin's face. "Something too sacred for ears profane? Am I to go away? or may I be allowed to remain if I promise to stop my ears?"

"Nonsense! nonsense!" cries the Squire, now thoroughly frightened by the tone the conversation is taking, and hastening to interpose a pacificatory reply. "Of course we have nothing that you may not hear; we have no secrets, have we, Jenny?"

"I do not know what you mean by secrets," replies Jane, in a displeased voice, turning her shoulder to her father.

"Go, dear!" says Miss Latimer, sarcastically, giving a slight push with one white hand to the Squire, who, in the indecision and uneasiness of his mind, has risen and now stands beside his tall daughter. "I would not for worlds detain you! Who could answer for what might be the consequences?"

CHAPTER III.

THIS it is to be a tutelar angel! This it is to have been the main beam of a building, the key-stone of an arch, the sole prop and support of a dependent family! The prop has been removed, and the family has found that it still stands upright; the angel has been obliged for a time to withdraw, and the family has made the discovery that the winnowing of her wings was rather irksome than otherwise. Hot tears rise to her eyes, as she sits, alone now, on the garden-seat, sung to by the happy beck, whose gaiety seems to have something ironical in it; but she swallows them back. It is too early in the day to begin to cry. Sunk in mortifying meditations, she remains in the same posture, unheeding the march of the summer day, until the sound of the distant gong, announcing luncheon, rouses her. At once she makes her way back to the house; but, though she uses her best speed, she finds, by the time she reaches it, her family almost half way through the meal.

"I hope you will excuse our beginning without you," says Jane, in her most elaborate hostess manner—Jane installed in hat and fichu at the head of the table, gloves and *en tout cas* lying beside her, and haste and business in every gesture—"but, really, with me to-day, time is money. I have a mother's meeting at 2.30, a lawn-tennis party at 4, and a singing-class at 6."

"Where is your lawn-tennis party to be?" asks Gillian, trying, for the Squire's sake, to speak in an amicable tone.

"It is at Mrs. Begbie's," replies Jane, a slight additional shade of color deepening the red of her cheek, and turning her head a little away as she pronounces the name of a widow of more than doubtful antecedents, who had come to settle in

the neighborhood shortly before Gillian's departure, and whose acquaintance she had studiously shunned.

"Is it possible that you visit *her?*" she asks, with an accent of surprise and indignation. "I can not say"—in the old hortatory voice that of late has so sadly missed its effect—"I can not say that I think her at all a good companion for you!"

"Don't you?" replies Jane, with a supercilious smile. "I do not think she will do me much harm; I am not very easily influenced by people, and papa likes me to be kind and neighborly to everybody—don't you, papa?"

The Squire's only answer is an uneasy gesture that may mean anything; and Gillian, moved to compassion and almost to laughter—though she does not, heaven knows, feel very mirthful—by the anguish of apprehension expressed by his whole air, hastens to change the conversation. Trying to soften the severity of her features, she turns to him, and, laying her hand with the old caressing gesture on his, asks:

"And you? Are you so busy, too?"

"I!" cries the squire, his brow clearing, and heartily returning the caress. "Oh, no! nothing very wonderful. I promised Anstruther"—Anstruther is the agent—"to ride over to Satterthwaithe's farm to see about some out-buildings that he is trying to get us to new-roof for him."

"And may I come too!" asks Gillian, eagerly, as the opportunities for admonition and exhortation afforded by the long, unbroken *tête-à-tête* of a mountain-ride flash across her. "I should love a gallop with you across the heather! It is so long"—wistfully—"since I had one."

"I should like nothing better," replies the Squire; but there are a perplexity in his face and an unreadiness in his tone which contradict the acquiescence of his words.

"But what?" cries she impatiently. "Surely nobody"—with a slight but unmistakable accent on the word—"can have any objection to make!"

"Oh, none—none in the world. Of course," rejoins he, confusedly, "it is only that—"

"Are you trying to tell me," she says, with a deepening tint and an unsteady voice, "that my horse, Dapple—I mean"—correcting herself—"the horse you used to allow me to call mine—is *sold*?"

"Sold! bless your heart, no!" cries he, with a rather forced laugh; "what could have put such an idea into your head? It is only"—beginning again to hesitate and flounder—"that we are rather short of horses just now, and so Jenny has been riding him of late, and she was rather thinking—were not you, Jenny?"—looking imploringly for help at her—"of riding him over to this tennis-party to-day.

There is a dead silence.

Gillian could not speak if she would, and would not if she could.

"You must settle it between yourselves," replies the Squire, rising hastily from his scarcely finished luncheon, and solving the problem by a dastardly retreat; "I am sure"—turning as he reaches the door to cast a parting glance of entreaty and deprecation at the two lowering young faces he leaves behind him—"I am sure that you will be able to settle it comfortably between yourselves."

The way in which they settle it comfortably between themselves is that, at the appointed hour, Miss Jane, sitting very square, and looking very grown-up in a well-made, Wolmerhausen habit, trots smartly off to her party; and that Gillian wastes the long splendor of the afternoon in idly and wrathfully erring about her former haunts; meeting at every turn traces of the reversal of her laws, the upsetting of her institutions, the contempt of, and revolt against, her whole scheme of government. Her shoe clubs, clothing clubs, coal clubs, lending library, are all languishing to their fall, or conducted on different and often opposite principles; and her drunkards have, to a man, relapsed. One of them, indeed, and the most promisin-

is in jail. It seems as if a sponge had been passed over the labors of her six years, wiping out and leaving no trace of the work she had thought so indelible.

"Is it possible that all this undoing can have been wrought in six short months? Is it possible that she has misreckoned, and that she has been away in reality six years?" Many times during the next week does she, in a half-maze of pain and wonder, ask herself this question.

A week is the period which, at her first apprehending of the changed condition of things, she has set before herself as sufficient, with tact and firmness, for the re-entering into her rights, the retaking her revolted realm. And now the week has passed, and she finds herself more hopelessly ousted than was ever exiled Stuart or banished Bourbon. She is obliged to own to herself that on the Marlowe throne there is not room for two, and that nothing is further from the present monarch's thoughts than abdiction. It is not that Miss Latimer has let her scepter tamely slip without an effort to retain it. To the contrary can testify many a hard-fought fight; but all in vain. In each pitched battle, in each slighter skirmish, Jane, with the nine points of the law in her favor—Jane, with her sense of duty, and her filial piety always ready to be glibly asserted, always set well in the fore-front of the fray—has come off invariably victorious.

Often when she is quite by herself and none can see her, Gillian yet covers her face with her hands as a rush of burning shame pours over her, when she recalls the pictures she had painted for Burnet of the position held by her in this family; of the boundless love and reverence with which she was regarded; of the absoluteness of her sway, and the benign clemency with which it was exercised. Oh, if he could see her now!

Another week has passed and another.

It is three weeks now since she left him and his sister; and of or from neither of them has she heard a word. Often when

her eyes are absently fixed on the lawny mists that swathe the fells' fair necks, or the voyaging cloud-shadows that slowly sweep across their pale flanks, her sore heart—dear as the fresh and wholesome country has ever been to her—is back in the airless London house; in the ugly upholstered drawing-room, with the india-rubber plant, and the somnolent tomcat and the crook-tempered poll-parrot. From the Tarltons she might possibly gather tidings—for that Sophia should allow the acquaintance so eagerly pursued to elapse, is not credible—but the Tarltons have been, ever since Gillian's return, absent from their country home on a family tour through the neighboring Lake district.

It is not till August is declining toward his close, till the harvest-fields are shorn, and the loose-strife empurples the river's lips, that at length on a shining forenoon the two girls make their appearance together at Marlowe. It is with unaffected pleasure that Gillian welcomes them; so sensibly do times and circumstances modify our feelings toward our friends. She is sitting on the low gray wall. They place themselves one on each side of her, and without a murmur she abandons a hand to each. As she looks from one to the other of the cheerful, friendly faces, she feels for the moment as if they were the dearest and most congenial of intimates, and as if such had always been her own opinion of them. Her jealousy of Sophia has of late been somewhat lulled to sleep, partly by the sound of that farewell blessing, which since it was spoken has never ceased to echo in her ears, partly because it has been crowded off the stage of her mind by other and more tangible troubles.

"So you are back again?" she says, turning her head with a smile from one to the other.

"Thank Heaven, yes!" cry they both in a breath.

"Profit by our experience, which, by the by, no one ever will do," says Sophia, shrugging. "Never take a pleasure-trip

with your family. We had to see so much of each other, and we all pulled different ways."

"Wherever we went, father and mother put us to shame with their squabbles," cries Anne, dutifully; "and as for us, we were not on speaking terms the whole time, which, as we took no maid with us, and all our gowns laced up the back, we found rather embarrassing,"

"The one bright spot in the whole expedition," says Sophia, "was certainly the meeting the Burnets at Ambleside; and, without vanity, I think I may say that we were as great a boon to them, as they, or rather he was, to us."

"The Burnets," repeats Gillian, in a low, tremulous voice, flushing painfully at this sudden and unexpected introduction of the name which she has been longing and hoping, and meaning by and by to manœuvre to hear.

"Yes, the Burnets!" replies Sophia, looking with surprise, but without suspicion (for it is astonishing how blunt one's senses are if not specially set on a track), at her friend's augmented bloom, regarding it as one of the accidents to which a transparent skin is liable, and which may go far toward reconciling a woman of sense to the possession of a coarser epidermis. "He is taking his holiday, you know; certainly not before he needs it: with him it really is the sword wearing out the scabbard. I told him so; I spoke to him very seriously about it, I assure you."

"Did you?"

"They are to come and stay with us shortly," pursues Miss Tarlton, in a complacent voice; "they are to take us in their way south."

"He showed no vulgar eagerness in his acceptance," says Anne, in a dry voice; "but ours is the real north-country hospitality. We would not take 'No,' eh, Sophia?"

"It was his exaggerated delicacy," says Sophia, thinking it on the whole wiser to slur over than contest her sister's speech; "for my part I think it a fault on the right side. He did not

understand at first that his sister was included in the invitation, and you know how quixotically chivalrous he is toward her."

"Did they say anything—did they send any message to me?" asks Gillian, trying to command her rebel voice, and addressing the question to Anne, to whom it seems easier to speak than to Sophia on this theme.

"Did they, Sophia?" asks Anne, carelessly. "You will know best; you were blessed with more of their converse than I was."

"Any message?" repeats Miss Tarlton, composedly; "not that I recollect—none, I think. But, of course, if you really care to see them—somehow I had an idea that you would not—we will certainly bring them over here some day; it will be an object for a drive."

If she care to see them! Her eyes, suffused with a sudden mist, turn for comfort from the unconscious human cruelty to the unwounding blandness of the lovely landscape. Oh, the variety of expression on these fells' faces! If any woman's had but a tithe of such fair changes, she might sway the world by her beauty's magic. To-day, dim and mysterious; to-morrow, sulky and same; the day after, laughing in sunny familiarity; the day after that, drowned in pettish tears! There is no end to their enchanting whims.

By and by Jane appears—appears, in order to give an ostentatious invitation to luncheon, accompanied by a somewhat patent implication that she is the only authentic source of such.

"Thank you, Jane," replies Sophia, coolly. "Gillian has already asked us. Dear me, child, how you grow! at this rate you will soon be a woman!"

Miss Jane's only answer is to toss her head, and walk away rather rapidly.

"What an odious girl!" cries Sophia, emphatically, as soon as—almost before—she is out of hearing.

"Do you think so?" says Gillian, demurely. "Uncle Marlowe says that she reminds him so much of me."

"Does he indeed?" replies Sophia, laughing, but without the violent and instant outcry of indignation which Gillian had fully expected and hoped for. "How absurd! but," with a little air of reflection, "I see what he means!"

Mortified by this unlooked-for response, Gillian again turns her eyes toward Ingleboro and the Lune. Already they have passed into another fair phase. The forground is washed in brilliant light, so that one can see each white cropping sheep, each couchant cow, almost each bright grass-blade in the fat pastures; and behind stand the fells, one grave chain of shadowed sister hills; then, even while she looks, a long sword of light that comes, one knows not whence—a lovely surprise—smites athwart the valley.

"Why is not she at school?" asks Sophia, presently, in a voice of some exasperation.

"Because she won't go," replies Gillian, dryly.

"*Won't!*" repeats Sophia, lifting her eyebrows. "Why, Gillian, that is a word that formerly you would not have allowed any of them to admit into their vocabulary."

"Should I not?" says Gillian, with a bitter smile. "Perhaps not; but now, you see, *nous avons changé tout cela*. Now they do not ask my leave."

"How truly glad I should be," says Sophia, with an accent of hearty sincerity, "to hear that the Squire had brought home an able-bodied, *strong-minded* step-mother some fine day to set over Jane!"

"A step mother!" repeats Gillian in a shocked voice, regarding her friend at the same time with a startled and disapproving air. "Impossible!"

"More unlikely things have happened!" replied Sophia, matter-of-factly. "He is not at all an old man as men go—the sunny side of sixty, I dare say—and, if he were properly smart-

ened and brushed up, a very presentable one. I can assure you that I think a woman might very easily do worse!"

"You are talking nonsense, Sophia; I must beg you to change the subject?" cries Gillian austerely, and reddening, as she violently repels the idea thus for the first time presented to her mind, clashing as it does with her life long picturesque conception of her uncle as a venerable old man, to be tended and protected with daughterly care, and in connection with whom the idea of marriage is irreverent and sacrilegious.

"With all my heart!" replies Sophia, good-humoredly; "but, however angry it may make you, I must repeat that many more unlikely things have happened, and that for my part I think it would be the salvation of the whole family."

CHAPTER IV.

Into the already numerous displeasures and uneasinesses of Gillian's lot there is now a new element introduced. The seed cast by Sophia's careless hand has germinated and begun to spring.

It is with altered and anxious eyes that she now looks at the Squire. God wot she wishes him health and long life; and yet, to her awakened preceptions it is a shock to find how illusary has been the idea of venerable age with which she has been investing him. There is absolutely nothing reverend in the short, grizzled hair, thick and upright, that she has been wont to stroke with protecting, tender hand, as if no rough breeze must be allowed to handle anything so venerable and so dear. Still less is there anything that speaks of caducity in the thick-set, sturdy figure and the vigorous limbs.

"About how old are you, dear?" she says to him one day, after having been looking at him for a long time, head on hand,

with an air of pensive disquiet ; "would you mind telling me?"

"How old I am!" repeats the Squire, in a doubtful voice. "Ah, there you puzzle me, Gill! That is what I never can recollect myself. I know that I am somewhere in the fifties, and that I was born on a Monday—Monday's child is full of grace,they say—but, if you were to kill me for it, I could not tell you to a year."

"Somewhere in the fifties. On the sunny side of sixty, therefore, as Sophia said. A foreboding misgiving strikes chill to Gillian's heart. If she has been right so far, what is there to hinder her from being right altogether? What is there to prevent him from bringing home any day that able-bodied step-mother of whom Miss Tarlton had prophetically spoken? Each time that, in the innocency of his heart, he goes out about his usual business and pleasures, she half expects to see him return leading such a one in triumph in his hand. And though by no step-mother could Gillian herself be more utterly ousted from all share in the government that she already is ; though under no *régime* could she be more entirely an outsider and a supernumerary than she is under the present one, yet she shrinks with unconquerable repugnance from the notion of seeing the Squire new wived.

One would think—if one went upon the supposition that people always follow the dictates of reason, are always consistant and rational—that Miss Latimer would rejoice in any change that would bring about the downfall of Jane ; but even this motive, potent as it is, is unequal to reconciling her to the unwelcome possibility. And yet, as the days go on, the situation, as it at present stands, grows more and more untenable. The daily jars wax ever more frequent and more bitter ; Jane's assertion of authority more arrogant ; her filial piety more ostentatious and more successful.

"Poor Jenny! she has a high spirit of her own, but she certainly is a most affectionate child!" is a phrase now constantly on her father's lips ; and it is one of the hardest among

Gillian's minor trials to give to this statement even the modified acquiescence of total silence.

Each night as she, with chafed temper and galled feelings, lays her head on the pillow, she asks herself:

"Why am I still here? Why, with all the world before me, am I still here?"

Perhaps it is because all the world is before her, because there is no determining motive to decide her choice of one place or one scheme of life rather than another, that she still keeps her painful post.

The present turn of affairs has found her so entirely unprepared, that the bewilderment of it still makes her brain whirl. Of all the numerous plans projected by her since her accession to fortune—plans of usefulness, power, and pleasure—Marlowe has ever been the pivot on which they turned: Marlowe, her home, the center of her system; the sun from which all her beams of beneficence are to radiate. And now that as, with each latening summer day, the conviction comes more frostily over her that this home is lost to her, this center destroyed, this sun extinguished, her heart fails and shrinks at the prospect of having to reconstruct her whole future life on other principles, with other factors, and alone.

Shall she, until she sees her way more clearly before her, accept some of the invitations that, being young, most fair, and with two hundred thousand pounds she has received to a score of good houses? She has not the spirits for it; she, of late so robustly cheerful, so innocently gay! Shall she travel? Whither? With whom? Why? Shall she set on foot an establishment of her own? Careless of the conventionalities as Burnet has often, irefully, found her, she is yet well aware that her age absolutely precludes the possibility of her living alone; and to search among a list of decayed gentlewomen for a companion of her daily life, instead of the warm and intimate circle of tender kindred that she had expected, is more than her fortitude can face.

The possession of that fortune, from which, in her own mind, she dates all her ills, is in itself an irksome and anxious burden to her. Conscientiously, painfully desirous of putting it to the best and noblest uses, she is yet as ignorant as a child of how to set about it. Who is to guide her? What, save her own good sense and judgment, of which of late she has conceived the deepest, honestest mistrust, is to hinder her from becoming the dupe of impostors and charlatans? Added to all these causes of irresolution and delay, there is yet another: a vague but powerful aversion from doing anything that may commit her to any decided course of action; a hope so intangible that it can hardly be called more than the wraith of one—a hope mistily floating ahead of her, never fully grasped, but yet of potency enough to make all projects that exclude it impossible to her—a hope built upon three kind words and a broken voice.

And so it is that now, though August—to outward eye the same, still golden, still suave, still questionless summer—has changed its name and become September, Gillian still loiters here. It is Wednesday, and market-day, and all the blazing noon, and the long afternoon, Gillian has spent standing in the Temperance-room (for at least this one among all her institutions she has succeeded in setting, however ricketily, on its legs again)—standing and pouring out cups of steaming tea, cutting slices of sultry beef, and melting bread and butter; wooing the market-people with ginger-beer and mutton pies. But sturdily as she has kept her place, her chief gains at the day's end seem to be her aching head and weary legs. Of her former customers the attendance has been scanty and discouraging. Possibly the arbitrary and unexplained closing of it three months ago has given them a rooted distrust of the establishment, and bade them return with remorseful fondness to the public-houses, that never change their minds, that depend upon the whims of no young misses or madams, that are always there.

And so it is that, toward evening, Gillian—all hope of further applicants being extinct—turns to leave her hot kitchen, and the viands that had seemed to her in the morning so appetizing, and that look so repulsive now; and, with throbbing temples and low spirits, climbs the hill home again. Arrived there, she finds Jane and her brother engaged in one of those single combats which are now of daily recurrence: she shaking him by his small shoulders, loudly threatening him with flagellation, bread and water, school; he kicking and wriggling, apostrophizing her as an "ugly old beast," and expressing a sobbing wish for her early decease.

Perhaps, on another occasion, when her temper was better under her control, and her nerves less irritated by previous friction, she might have wisely abstained from interference; heeding the cautious saw which tells us that

> "They who in quarrels interpose,
> May chance to get a bloody nose."

But her feelings have already, through the ill-success of her day's labors, been upset, her mind unstrung, and her body is tired and uncomfortable. Add to which, that of all the rubs of her daily life of late, Jane's mode of education with regard to little Dick—consisting, as it does, of alternate foolish coaxings and angry cuffs—has been one of the worst. At her first entry her little boy has fled, lustily roaring, to her arms; and is now stammering out the narrative of his grievances and his hatred of Jane on her breast.

"Leave him alone!" cries Miss Latimer commandingly, with flashing eyes, as she sees symptoms on the part of Miss Marlowe of advancing to reclutch her victim; "don't dare to touch him! You are not fit to be trusted with him, and so I warn you that I shall tell Uncle Marlowe."

"Pray do!" replies Jane, pertly. "I am sure you have my full permission. I am not at all afraid of papa's misjudging my motives, or disapproving my conduct!"

"You are ruining the child!" cries Gillian, still flashing-eyed and panting; "ruining his temper, his manners, his—"

"Am I indeed?" interrupts Jane, insolently. "I must say I should have thought I might be trusted to manage my own little brother. I think it would be a blessing if some people would learn to mind their own business!"

This is the highest flight of impertinence that Jane's wing has yet dared, and for a moment Gillian stands stunned and aghast at it. Then "Leave the room, Jane!" she says majestically, pointing to the door.

It is rash to give orders that you have no means of enforcing.

"Leave the room!" repeats Jane coolly, seating herself deliberately in an arm-chair. "You must be joking! Why should I leave my own drawing-room?"

"Then I will leave it myself," cries Gillian, perceiving too late her error. "I will not stay to be so spoken to."

So saying, she turns precipitately, yet with a grandiose gesture, to quit the field.

Her voice is raised and shaking; her cheeks are scarlet; her gray eyes like furious fires. It is not the moment which, were she given her choice, she would select for a visitor to present himself to her; and yet such a one is even now standing in the doorway; standing—the footman's announcement of his presence having been drowned in the noise of their contention—standing unperceived, irresolute, abashed.

In a moment she has recognized him. It is Burnet—Burnet, whose first introduction to her in the bosom of the family of which she has always represented herself as the one prime blessing and Paraclete is to find her thus a raging Mænad—a scolding shrew.

For a moment, the shock of that surprise strikes her dumb and still. Then the full shame and humiliation of the situation rushing over her, she recovers the power of motion; but the sole use she makes of it is to stumble past him, without

attempting any greeting, out of the room, out of the house; nor has he the cruelty to try to arrest her.

How long she strays in confused red misery about the blooming garden, with bursting temples and thundering heart, she does not know. The time seems to her unendingly long.

By and by, as the minutes pass and pass, a dread, even greater than that which has hitherto possessed her of meeting him with her disfigured face and prostrated pride, takes possession of her; the dread that she may *not* meet him; that he may go away without making any further attempt to see her. The thought that the last impression he may carry away of her is that of a loud Xantippe, wrangling in a vulgar brawl, is more than she can bear.

A panic seizes her. Perhaps he has gone already. She hastens to a spot whence she can command the road by which she knows he must depart; the back drive, a straight avenue of tall old elms, running up to a gray-pillared gate with stone balls at the top. There is no sign of him. She hastens to the stable-yard. At least he is still here; the dog-cart that brought him stands horseless, with its shafts resting on the ground, as if it meant to make some stay.

She returns to the back drive, to a spot which he must needs pass, and whence she can at least wave her tear-soaked pocket-handkerchief, and smile at him as he rolls away. By and by she sees him issue from the hall-door alone, and begin to cast his eyes around as one that seeks some one or something. It is what she has wished and anxiously hoped, and yet now that she is assured that her fears were vain, that he does not mean to depart without exchanging a word of some sort or other with her, that potent shame again assumes the mastery.

She stands perfectly still, perversely almost desiring that he may miss the glimmer of her white gown behind the elm-tree boles. But by eye as keen and careful as his, the thing sought seldom remains unfound. In a moment she sees that he is

making straight for her. In another moment he is standing beside her, and they have shaken hands. At first neither speaks. Then—

"I—I—came to say good-by to you," he says in an awkward voice, and looking extremely embarrassed—"I must be going!"

"Must you?" she answers, in a tone to the full as constrained and uneasy as his own. "I suppose so; it is a fine evening. You will have a pleasant drive."

"Yes," he answers mechanically, "I shall have a pleasant drive."

They are both silent for a space, looking at the little serene picture before them—a low gray church tower, a cluster of ash-trees, and a lilac fell, all framed between the rough elm-stems. By and by she speaks:

"I am evidently an impossible person to live with," she says, with a watery smile. "You remember how you and I used to fall out, and now you see on what footing I am here!"

Under the circumstances, this is an observation to which it would be difficult to find an agreeable and at the same time unimpeachably truthful answer. He wisely does not make the attempt. He does not even look toward her. His eyes are staring at the evening fields, seen under the arms of a great ash-tree to be all one dazzling green; not a hawkweed nor a belated buttercup breaking the aftermath's rich, same verdure. Probably, to his town-tired eyes the verdancy of the deep pastures is unendingly refreshing.

"I will not ask you what you think of my veracity," she goes on, with a tremulous laugh, "after the travelers' tales I used to tell you about my influence and my usefulness here. They tally so well with what you have just seen, don't they? But, indeed—indeed," turning her face toward his averted one, and speaking with an accent of plaintive eagerness, "it was not always like this. I exaggerated my own value, of course, as you

know I always have done; but I *was* of use—they *did* love me—they *did* respect me!"

She breaks off, choked with mortified tears.

"I am sure they did," he says, in a moved voice, looking extremely uncomfortable; "I have not the least doubt of it."

"Do you remember," she says, wiping her eyes, and smiling painfully, "one day when I was bragging to you about how indispensible I was to them, and that I could not bear to think of how much they were missing me, you told me I might console myself, for that no doubt they were doing very well without me?"

"Did I?" he answers, dryly. "I had no idea of being a prophet; I only meant to be ill-natured."

"But you see it came true," she says, shaking her head.

Again they are silent. The evening waxes late, and the face of the valley is changed. Here, on this side of it, they stand in shade; but seeing the mystic flush reflected on the faces of the rose-red hills on the other side, they know that the great pageant of the sun's death is going on out of sight behind them.

"What a sunset there must be to be seen from the hill-top!" she says presently, in a low voice. "Shall we—will you come? If we make haste, we might see it."

She has half-stretched out her hand in friendly invitation toward him, then suddenly draws it back; while a sincere regret at having offered the invitation, mixed with an almost certain apprehension of having it refused, is redly painted on her face.

For a moment he hesitates, looking uncertainly from her to the flushing fells, and from the flushing fells to her. Then, as if the deprecation of her look, expecting yet still dreading a rebuff, were too much for him, he says quickly:

"Yes, by all means. I will come! After all, there is no reason why I should not."

The last clause of his sentence seems addressed rather to

himself than to her. Without another word they turn, and begin to walk briskly toward the hoary, gray stone gateway, above which the elms, high aloft in the air, wave ever in a green embrace. They must make haste, if they hope to gain one flaming glimpse of the westering king before he parts. Perhaps this is why it is in such almost total silence that they together breast the hill and the sharp, fresh evening wind.

On the summit of a slope ahead of them, they see the feeding cattle outlined against the sky. From the spot where they are pasturing, they must have the fullest prospect of what he and she are panting to attain. They do not even lift their placid heads. They do not think it worth looking at. When at length, warm and breathless, with tingling veins and beating pulses, they stand on the desired crest, they find that the pageant is over—the lights put out; it is all grey, all gone! They are just too late.

"I must beg your pardon," she says, sinking down on the thymy turf, and speaking between quick, short breaths; "I have brought you on a fool's errand!"

He nods assentingly, and, after again looking irresolute for a moment, seats himself beside her.

"If we had set off just five minutes earlier," she says, her eye straying discontentedly over the now uniformly grey-wimpled fells; "if"—with a slight accent of annoyance—"you could have torn yourself away five minutes earlier from the delights of Jane's society!"

At her tone an ironical smile of amusement and malice curves his serious mouth.

"Was it my fault that I was left *tête-à-tête* with her?" he answers dryly.

"Uncle Marlowe says," begins Gillian, slowly and nervously watching the effect of her words out of the corner of an anxious eye, "that she reminds him a good deal of *me!*"

"Of you?" slightly raising his eyebrows; "indeed!"

There is in his tone no evidence of acquiescence in the

Squire's opinion; but, on the other hand, there is scarcely more of astonishment and indignation than there was in Sophia Tarlton's when the same communication was made to her.

"Miss Tarlton says that she sees what he means," pursues the girl, rather falteringly; "perhaps" (directing another uneasy glance at her companion's eager face—eager even when in repose)—"perhaps you agree with her; perhaps you think that he is right?"

The smile has been spreading evidently against his will from his mouth to his eyes.

"I can only suppose," he says unreadily, "that what he means to imply is that you are both rather fond of your own way."

This suggestion, even though advanced with some diffidence, is more than Gillian can bear.

"Both! both!" she cries reddening; "is it possible that you bracket us together? Well," with an accent of profound mortification, "however much alike we may be—and, according to the combined testimony of our friends, apparently are—one thing is certain, and that is, that we can not go on much longer living in the same house together!"

"You think not?" in a tone of interested, grave attention.

"I am certain of it," she answers emphatically; "how she has compassed it I can not tell. I suppose," with a resentful eye-flash at him, "that since we resemble each other so much I ought to know, but I do not; but at all events, by some means she has managed to supplant me in my place, my duties, my rights!"

"Your rights!" he repeats bluntly, and not looking at her; "what rights? I can not for the life of me see that you have any."

Then, perceiving that she is too much thunderstruck by this new view of the case to be able to reply, he goes on dryly:

"I thought I had always understood even from yourself that you were only a *locum tenens*—a *locum tenens* until Miss M

lowe grew up. There can be no doubt as to her being grown up now!" (with a smile at the recollection of Jane's elaborate manners).

"Grown up!" repeats Gillian, recovering the use of her angry tongue at this last stroke; "she is a mere child! You all combine for some reason to make her out a woman, but in reality she is only a child, barely sixteen."

"She looks eighteen," replies Burnet, stoutly; undaunted apparently by an enkindled eye and a vermeil cheek, and sticking to his point with British tenacity—"I should have thought her eighteen, if not—" with a rather teasing smile—"nineteen or twenty!"

"You are of course joking," says Gillian, with a slight return to her old loftiness of manner. "I think, please, that if you can not help making merry over what to me at least is an extremely serious matter, I should prefer that we should not discuss it."

So, trenchantly speaking, she turns away both neck and head, and fixes her displeased grey eyes on a little round hill in the foreground, intensely green in the vanishing light; a little hill crowned by a handful of slender ash trees, and a small, old-fashioned Belvedere, built by some forgotten Marlowe for his forgotten children and friends to hold their long-dead summer frolics in. It is Burnet who first breaks the silence.

"I am very sorry for you," he says, presently, wrinkling his brows uneasily, and in a rather grudging tone. "I know that it was so wholly unexpected by you; I know that formerly, in —— Street, you were always counting the hours till you could get back to them here."

"Was I?" she says, a little unreadily, her heart giving but a doubtful adhesion to this statement. "At all events," going on more fluently, "I always reckoned upon this as sure standing-ground, wherever else the earth might give way under my feet; and now that this has crumbled away, I do not think I quite know how to take it—I am at sea!"

Her eyes are still absently fixed on the Belvedere and the little hillock's turfy slopes, and she has put up her hand to her forehead as if the movement might help to clear her brain. He makes no answer, but she does not miss the lacking reply. Whether he speak or not, is he not sitting here beside her on the twilit fell-side—not in a hurry, not over tired, with his anxious brow cleared and his eager look at rest? There are to her at once repose and tonic in that knowledge.

By and by she turns to him with an animated air; her whole expression changed and enlivened.

"After all," she cries, eagerly, "do you think that it can be quite such a hopeless case even yet? What do you say? Whatever age Jane may look"—with a slight resentful stress—"she is in reality only sixteen; surely"—with an air of returning confidence—"I ought to be able to manage a girl of sixteen!"

He shakes his head.

"I would not try," he answers laconically.

"Would not you?" rejoins she, reddening and unconvinced. "I can not think"—with a touch of pomposity—"that it is right to turn back merely because there are difficulties in the path of duty."

"But it is not the path of duty!" objects he, brusquely; "you are deceiving yourself! Miss Marlowe is in her rightful place—the place of which you were only the provisional and temporary occupant. She is pleased; her father is pleased; everybody is pleased. I can not see"—with great seriousness—"that you have any business to interfere."

For a moment she loses the power of speech; then—

"Is it possible?" she says, in a deeply-wounded voice—"has it come to this! that you, even *you*, take part with her against me!"

"It is no question of taking part!" he cries impatiently, annoyed at her feminine lack of logic. "I never saw her, to my knowledge, before to-day, nor have any special wish ever

to see her again. It is a question of abstract right and justice. If I see you, through a wrong-headed notion of duty and principle, on the high-road to set a whole family by the ears, I think the kindest office I can do you is to disabuse you."

Even to himself his words, as he speaks them, sound harsh; and they are not well out of his mouth before he has repented himself of their severity—all the more when he sees their effect on the hurt, mobile face beside him.

At first it is clear that an angry retort has leaped to her tremulous lips; but with great difficulty she swallows it back; and after fighting with herself for several moments, speaks almost humbly:

"I dare say that you are right; it is not the first time that you have made scales fall from my eyes—have made me see myself as I am. But if, as I now quite agree with you, I am not wanted here; if I am in the way, and they would all do better without me; what do you advise me to do with my life? what do you think had better become of me?"

As she speaks she turns her sad and mortified eyes, reft of all their confidence and pride, half-obscured by scalding tears, full upon him. There is such a meek abandonment of her own judgment, such an entire leaning on his guidance expressed in her whole air and gestures—in the very pose of her pliant body, and in each quivering feature, that for a moment the harsh mentor's self-control goes nigh to playing him false.

"I know," she continues presently, a little dashed by receiving no encouragement from him to go on, "that I have no possible right to tease you with my difficulties, any more than I have any other ordinary acquaintance; but I suppose"—very apologetically—"that it is the force of habit; I had got into the way of looking to you for counsel and direction."

"I would help you if I could," he answers, ungraciously, without glancing at her, "but, in so serious a matter as the choice of a whole mode of life, you could not expect me to take upon myself the responsibility of influencing you!"

"Of course not," she answers, faintly, but her heart sinks

"There is not the slightest fear of a woman in your position lacking advisers," he goes on, harshly, plucking with a gesture of intense nervous irritation at the small thyme sprigs beside him; and even if there were, I, for my part, think that you are very well calculated to stand alone."

At the cold and nipping severity of his words her lips tremble.

"Do you think so?" she says in a wounded tone.

At the little plaintive quiver in her voice he catches his breath. To match that quiver are doubtlessly two great salt drops hanging, ready to fall on her brown lashes. If he sees them, he is undone.

"I do not think about it," he answers, brutally, almost turning his back upon her as he speaks. "I am certain of it."

There is a silence, broken at last by Gillian.

"Do you remember," she says, timidly (for the tone of his last sentence has chilled her to the marrow of her bones)—"but of course you do, for I dinned it well into your ears—how I used to boast of my charities here, of how admirably I managed them, and how prosperous they were? Well, let me tell you" (with a bitter smile) "that they have, one and all, collapsed!"

As she speaks she raises her hands in the air, and lets them fall again, as if to express, by pantomime, the completeness of the ruin that has overtaken her infant-schools and adult drunkards, her Bands of Hope, and other social regenerators.

"Have they, indeed?" he says, in a rather gentler tone.

"And so now," she continues wearily, but with a shade of irony, "however high may be your opinion of my strength of mind and self-sufficingness, I really have not the heart to begin all over again—to repeat in great the failures I have already made in little; to blunder on without any one to help me, and—alone!"

She hesitates an instant before pronouncing the last word, and her voice sinks slightly in uttering it.

About the fells is gathering the mystery of eve; they look both loftier and more far than they did at noon. A light exhalation begins to dim the meadows.

"There is no reason, I suppose, why you should be alone," he says bluntly, after an interval—an interval spent in who shall say what hard fighting!

"None whatever," she answers quietly but with bitterness. "I might of course engage a lady companion—certainly no one would object; and no doubt there are plenty of poor gentlewomen who, for the sake of bread, would consent to submit to even my humors."

"That is not what I meant," he says awkwardly.

"Then I suppose," rejoins she in a collected voice, that contrasts with his evident discomposure, "that you must be alluding to the likelihood of my marrying?"

"Of course I am," he answers almost rudely, again with that feverish plucking at the mountain grass; "to what else?"

She shakes her head.

"It is possible, but not probable."

There is another pause. The mists are gaining body; thicker and whiter they surge in the valley.

"I hope," he says in a hurried voice, breathing short and unevenly, "that you have made no rash vow—for your own sake, I must express a hope that you have taken no Quixotic resolution—or that, if you have, you will break it as soon as possible."

"I have taken no Quixotic resolution," she answers, slowly repeating his words, and rising as she speaks from the dew-moistened turf. "I do not suppose that the prospect of missing what is best in life is any sweeter to me than it would be to any other girl of my age."

"I am very glad to hear it," he says almost inaudibly, and whitening.

"But for all that," she says very soberly, and shaking her fair head, "I can not help thinking—that I shall remain—as I am—until my dying day."

As she ends, she lifts, as if suddenly impelled by some resistless inward might, her steel-gray eyes to his, which, for this once, are powerless to escape them; and, for a long moment, while the hills darken and the soft mists wreathe and twine, he looks with reluctant silent passion into her very soul. But it is, and remains, silent. By and by, with a chill shiver of disappointment, she turns away.

"It grows late," she says, "let us go."

Then, without another word, they turn and descend the hillside.

Ten minutes later, she is watching him from her window, as he drives away and is lost in the falling night.

"Wicked, wicked pride!" she cries, clasping her hands in a spasm of impotent pain; "there is nothing, nothing but you between us!"

CHAPTER V.

"Warum sind denn die Rosen so blass,
O sprich, mein Lieb, warum?
Warum sind denn, im grunen Gras,
Die blauen Veilchen so stumm?"

She may stand as often as she pleases, looking across the dance and quiver of the elm-leaf shadows that daily hold their merrymaking in the back drive, but not again does she see him pass, either in dog-cart, on horseback, or on foot, between the stone walls of the gray-pillared back-gate.

I think that he is in no hurry to repeat the fell-side ordeal. And meanwhile the rich summer latens. The shadows now hasten, now tarry upon the hills' fair flanks; the heather, made all of kings' mantles, spreads its opulent purple; before fresh winds the clouds career in lovely shapes along the sky.

And at all these sweet sights, so dearly loved by them both, it only lies with him that they should be daily and hourly together looking. He could come on no moment of the day when her heart was not awaiting him. And he comes not at all.

After that first visit of compelled courtesy, he refrains himself and comes not. At first she attributes his non-appearance to accident, and to the monopolizing nature of Miss Tarlton's attentions. Her jealousy of Sophia—of late well-nigh extinct—begins again to smolder into flame. In imagination she daily makes a third in the little expeditions in Anne's basket-carriage, which, before his arrival, Sophia had overtly planned. And yet, after all, as time reveals to her, it is not Sophia who is in fault.

One day she has been sitting for a listless hour on that very spot on the fell-side where the falling dew and the hastening night had overtaken them; her eyes fixed on the Belvedere and the deep verdure of Sellet Bank, reconstructing, as she has done a score of times before, his speech and her own, and trying to extract from it elements of hope and promise, which it can not reasonably be made to afford.

She is sauntering now in limp dejection back to the house, when, passing through the stable-yard, her eyes fall on a pony-carriage—undoubtedly the Tarlton pony-carriage; and on a pony—undoubtedly also the Tarlton pony—being led off, hot and harnessed, to a stall.

In a moment, the blood that five minutes ago seemed hardly to be crawling through her slow veins set off in eager frisk through her young system. He has come at last! Sophia has evidently driven him over.

Eager to lose no moment of his long-delayed presence, she hastens to the morning-room; taking off her light hat, and passing her hand over her smooth hair as she goes. At the door she must needs pause for a minute to gather breath and calmness. Yes, there is certainly a man's voice. She turns the handle, and, confused yet confident, enters.

There are only four persons in the room: Jane, in lofty hostess-wise—for it is as much as even she can do to keep the Tarlton familiarity in check—discoursing Anne; and Sophia in sprightliest dialogue with the Squire. He has not come, after all! Even in this moment of supreme disappointment, it flashes across her mind to wonder how the Squire can have been taken thus unawares; for surely, unless privily trapped and overtaken, he would never have fallen thus a prey to his life-long bugbear, morning visitors.

She looks across at him in half-compassionate inquiry, to see with what measure of fortitude he is bearing the infliction; but, to her surprise, finds that she may keep her commiseration for herself, who alone needs it.

He does not look quite like himself, it is true. There is a nameless something that is odd about him; but, whatever that something may be, she can detect no trace of *ennui* on the broad ruddiness of his good-natured face. Thinking that she will at all events give him the opportunity of escape by taking Sophia off his hand, she seats herself beside the latter; but is immediately beckoned away by Anne, who, however, when she has obeyed her summons, does not appear to have anything to impart that justifies or explains it.

Jane has taken the opportunity of her cousin's entry to sail out of the room; her hands spanning her waist, with a *dégagé* air that seems to say that the visitors are none of hers, and that she washes her hands of them.

"You drove over in the pony-carriage?" says Gillian, making a great effort to speak lightly, and passing her hand over her

face, to ascertain by touch, if possible, whether it looks as blank and gray as she feels it.

"Yes," replies Anne, glancing at her dog-skin gloves; "the pony was so fresh, he nearly pulled my arms off."

"I suppose"—growing reassured as to there being anything strange in her own appearance by the slightness and cursoriness of her friend's survey of her—"I suppose that you are alone again—that—that—you have lost your guests?"

"The Burnets?" replies Anne, carelessly "No. Sophia teased him to drive her over here to-day, but he cut her very short—you know, poor man, that manners never were his strong point—and so, as she was determined to come over to-day, she made me drive her instead."

"Determined to come over, was she?" repeats Gillian, gratefully, thinking how incapable she would have been of such a flight of friendship in a like case; "how very good-natured of her!"

"Yes, very good-natured!" replies Anne, with a dryness of tone which somehow contradicts her apparent assent; "but then you know we are such a good-natured family!"

As she speaks, she looks meaningly across at her sister, and Gillian naturally does the same.

In the pause in their own talk they can not help hearing what the Squire and Sophia are saying. It is Sophia who speaks:

"I delight in him!" she is saying, in a rather patronizing tone, "and so I think would you if you knew him *really*. I suggested his coming with me to-day, but he tells me that he has already paid his respects, and, as the pony-carriage is very cramping to a man's legs, I did not press it. He and his sister are both characters in their way. I am sure you would think so. I wish" (laughing) "that you knew *her*. I assure you," (as if making a generous admission) "I quite like them both."

"Have not we changed our tune?" says Anne, *sotto voce*, with a malicious smile; "it is such a blessing! we hear no

more about hospitals and professional men! I suppose" (sinking her voice still lower, and looking extremely knowing) "that you see which way the wind sets now?"

"Which way the wind sets?" repeats Gillian; "indeed I do not."

By and by the Tarltons take their leave, and Gillian and her uncle stand under the elm-boughs, watching them bowl away in their little chaise with their pulling pony up hill, toward the red sunset.

"Thank you so much, dear!" says the girl, her hand thrust affectionately through his solid arm, and her soft cheek gently chafing itself against his rough shoulder.

"You have been really too good. I had no notion that you were such an actor. I am sure that no one who did not know you as well as I do would have ever guessed that you were not perfectly happy, and in your element."

The Squire does not answer this fond encomium; and if her conscience were not absolutely clear of having said anything that could produce such an effect, she would say that he looked rather foolish.

"There is not anything very amusing, is there, dear," she says, continuing her caress, "in the cackle of a parcel of girls, to a sensible old gentleman like you?"

Is it possible that, for the first time in his life, he is withdrawing himself from her endearments? that he is making an effort—faint, indeed, but perceptible—to shake off the pressure of her arm?

"To hear you talk, Gill," he says in a voice of distinct vexation, "one would think that I was eighty years old at least."

From this day onward it becomes hourly a deeper, bitterer certainty to Gillian that she must renounce that hope which of late has been the chief factor in her life-plans. Clutch it to her heart as desperately as she may, it must go. Other prosperities come pouring in upon her. A distant relation dies, and leaves her a further and unexpected addition to her fortune

in lands, houses, shares in a bank, what not? but to that one dubious good, which to many would seem no good at all, she must needs say farewell as bravely as she may. There can be now no doubt as to his intentional and resolved avoidance of her.

Again and again have the Tarltons driven over—Sophia's friendship, in especial, seeming to grow ever warmer and warmer, as the days shorten and cool; but not once has his foot—natural and but barely civil as would be a visit, considering their acquaintance and former relation—crossed the threshold of Marlowe.

And she can do nothing—nothing! She has already, as she sometimes with humiliated tears acknowledges to herself, gone further and done more than in consistence with strictest maidenly dignity she ought to have done. There is nothing for it now but to wrestle valiantly with that pain which, in the world's eye, degrades the woman that smarts under it—the pain of an unshared love.

But as we all desire to put off our day of execution, so Gillian, in her sad mind, defers the beginning of that fight which must certainly be long—which to herself she says will be endless—until he, for whom it is waged, has left the neighborhood. It is not worth while beginning as long as there is a chance, almost a probability, of meeting him at any turn of the mountain-road, or any winding of the brawling Lune.

One day, at luncheon, yielding to the hardly acknowledged hunger that gnaws her to see him once again, whether he will or no, before he parts, she suggests a visit to the Tarltons—a suggestion which to those to whom it is made seems innocent enough, but which suffuses her own conscious face with guilty blushes in making it.

"You may do as you please, of course," replies Jane, grandly, "but it is no concern of mine; they do not even condescend to ask for me when they call, as I took the trouble to inquire. I certainly shall not put myself out of my way to

pay attentions to people who choose to ignore me completely in my own papa's house!"

Gillian's spirit can not be what it was, or she would have risen to this challenge. As it is, a now habitual depression coupled with a fear—perfectly needless—of having the motives of her proposition suspected, keeps her silent, and the project would infallibly have fallen to the ground, had not aid come from an unexpected quarter.

"I think, Gill," says the Squire, partially shading his ruddy face with one hand, and idly balancing a fork upon the fingers of the other, "that I may be very likely—that it is not impossible—that I may be obliged to go—on business, somewhere in that direction, and I do not mind giving you a lift—part of the way—if you like."

"Oh, thank you, dear!" cries Gillian, joyfully, her pleasure enhanced by this instance of display of spirit, and with a triumphant glance at Jane; "it would be delightful."

She is ready, feverishly ready and expectant, before the appointed hour, tapping the flags of the terrace with impatient heels and awaiting her uncle. When at length he appears, drawing on with some difficulty a new pair of dog-skin gloves:

"Why, what a dandy you are, dear!" she cries, regarding with an air of incredulous admiration the perfectly new Tweed suit which since they last parted he has endued; the irreparable shabbiness of his clothes having been a life-long subject of dispute between them. "You look as if you were going to a wedding."

"Pooh, nonsense!" cries he, reddening, hastily handing her into the phaeton, and immediately driving quickly off.

Neither of them speaks much as they go.

When they set off, the sky was for the most part one great continent of sober gray, broken here and there by little islands of piercing blue; but, as they pass along, the smoky curtain is drawn aside, and the whole fair hill-country grows one smile.

The Squire is no great admirer of the beauties of nature;

and if compelled by his companion of the moment to become aware of any special effect of sunshine and shade, of any unusual glory of violet fell or silver river, is wont to cry, "Beautiful! beautiful!" without looking, and immediately change the subject.

Knowing this peculiarity, Gillian makes no call upon him for admiration, and her reticence costs her the less that to-day her own sense of the joy and beauty of earth seems numb and cold. She looks at the fells as if she were looking at them through a crape veil. As they reach the Tarltons' lodge —

"Thank you, dear," she says, making a movement as if to alight, "I need not take you farther out of your way; I will walk up to the house."

"Nonsense!—nonsense!" he cries, and to avoid further discussion, turns briskly in.

As they trot through the park, her heart begins to pulse fast yet not pleasurably, in anxious deprecation of a new disappointment. She seems to have had so many of late. Is he here still? or has not, as is far more probable, his holiday run out? Is he gone?

She looks wistfully, as if consulting them, at the copses, the cattle blandly ruminating, the thorn-bushes. Do they look as if he were still here? Arrived at the hall-door, and having ascertained that Mrs. Tarlton is at home, she turns again to her uncle with fresh thanks.

"*Au revoir*," dear," she says, pleasantly. "You need not trouble to send back the carriage for me. I will walk home."

Who knows what pale hope may dictate the last clause of her sentence? But, to her surprise, the Squire has thrown the reins on the horses' backs, and shows every symptom of meaning to accompany her. He gives no explanation of this change of intention, beyond a murmur as to not wishing to seem unneighborly, and as to its being perhaps more civil to look in for five minutes.

Mrs. Tarlton and the young ladies are in the garden on the

lawn-tennis ground, as the butler informs them, and thither they presently follow him. As they near the spot, the light thud of the balls against the racquets; the noise of young voices crying out, in terms so dark to outsiders, the progress of the game, "fifteen," "thirty," "fault," "set," break pleasantly on the crisp autumn air. Against the background of fells and flowers, the girls' light gowns, and the white flannels of the schoolboy brothers, with whom they are playing, stand out in homely cheerfulness.

It is one of the Tarlton family's best moments—a moment that presents them united and picturesque. Beyond the tennis-ground, under the trees, a tea-table is spread, and garden-chairs stand in line. Who are the occupants of those chairs? For a moment, Gillian dares not lift her eyes to ascertain. But the instant of suspense can be, and is, but short.

At their approach the players have ceased their playing, and, with racquets still in their hands and flushed, smiling faces, have advanced to welcome them. At the same moment the portly form of Mrs. Tarlton begins to hoist itself out of the groaning depths of a wicker-chair. The rest of the chairs are empty, with the exception of one on which another elderly female figure remains seated. It is Miss Burnet who, with her back to the view, and her head tied up in a bag—that is, closely swaddled in a black gauze veil—is enjoying the country after her manner.

"Did you meet John?" she asks, brusquely, when her turn to be greeted comes. "I have sent him to Kirkby to get me some pulsatilla; people may think it as odd as they choose, but I am a homœopath!"

"No, we did not," replies the girl faintly, heart and voice failing at this sudden slaying of a hope which had been stronger than she had known.

"It is not that I absolutely have a cold already," continues Miss Burnet, pursuing that branch of the subject which has most interest for her; "but it is well to take things in time,

and one knows what a tickling at the top of the throat means."

"We did not meet him," repeats Gillian more distinctly, in the hope of recalling Miss Burnet to the original theme; but in vain.

"There is nothing like pulsatilla for a tickling at the top of the throat," she says decisively, and then relapses into silence.

By and by, Anne lures her friend away from the rest, in order to indulge in one of those confiding talks in which she is fond of turning outward, for her benefit, the seamy side of the family history. It is not till all the skeletons in the Tarlton closet have been parading for a good half-hour before her mind's eye, shown off to the best advantage by Anne's practiced hand, that she has an opportunity of placing the *quasi* careless remark, which, ever since they have been alone, she has been internally practicing:

"I can not think how we could have missed meeting Dr. Burnet. Has he been long gone?"

"He is a bear!" cries Anne, pettishly, and making a face; "he may be very good at cutting off arms and legs but he is a bear! As soon as he caught sight of you and the Squire coming up the drive, he was off like a shot!"

"Was he?" says Gillian, suddenly putting up her hand to hide the mouth, of the tightening of whose lines she is distressfully conscious.

We may govern our eyes, and the nose is no index of any sensation beyond heat and cold; it is the treacherous mouth that, even when silent, blabs our secrets and undoes us.

"How complimentary!" with a forced laugh. "Well, at all events, we can not take it as a personal affront, for he could not have recognized us at that distance."

"Oh, but he did, though," replies Anne, officiously, "for we all knew the carriage—nobody else about here drives roans—and cried out that it was you."

Gillian is painfully silent, and for a moment there is no

sound but the light patter of horse-chestnuts on the walk, that in falling cleave and burst, and roll their burnished nuts out of the white-lined cradles that housed them.

"I can not think why Sophia dragged him here," continues Anne, crossly; "she always thinks that her own society is amusement enough for any one, but I never can find that the rest of the world agrees with her."

Gillian's sole answer is a semi-articulate sound which is sufficiently like assent for Anne to proceed.

"You know," she says, in a comfortable, confidential voice, "that, between you and me, men do not take to Sophia as a rule. I can not think why it is, I have oftened wondered; but in this case the fact simply is that the poor man is dying to get back to his physic-bottles."

"Then why does not he go to them?" asks Gillian, speaking more slowly than her wont, and in a measured voice that yet has a slight tremble in it.

"Because he can not leave us saddled with that old incubus," replies Anne, indicating by a slight movement of the head the distant, reclining form of Miss Burnet, "and nothing will induce her to stir; she says she is very well where she is, and she does not see why she should move. However, I believe he is going to take the law into his own hands at last—that he has ordered a fly and told her maid to pack up without letting her know, and that they really are off on Tuesday, and a very good thing too, say I"—giving a pettish kick to one of the fallen horse-chestnuts on the walk.

"A very good thing," repeats Gillian, mechanically.

She says it again to herself as she drives home, sitting silently by the Squire's side in the rose-stained sea of sunset that is washing over fell and valley. Is it not a good thing? Is not certainty better than suspense? night than twilight? despair than the sickly flicker of an extinguishing hope?

CHAPTER VI.

SHE is to be given one more chance. Her expiring hope is to give one more moribund quiver. If our hopes went all at once, we could better let them part. It is the tantalization of their ups and downs, of their flamings and sinkings, that makes the darkness into which they finally disappear more black and utter.

The day before that of the Burnets' departure is Sophia Tarlton's birthday; and, partly in celebration of it, partly as a farewell ovation—a burst of final affection for the guests, whose approaching departure has perhaps revived the somewhat flagging appreciation of their merits—she has organized a little expedition. As it is in great measure given in their honor, and as the sister declines, with her usual uncompromising churlishness, to have anything whatever to say to it, it will be almost impossible for the brother to avoid taking his part in it. At least, so Gillian reasons. Yet once more he will be compelled to be, and, what is more, to be during several hours, in her company.

"I can not think why any one so decidedly getting on in life as Sophia," says Anne, privately—"you know she is twenty-seven, and I am sure she looks every day of it—should care to remind people of her birthday; but I suppose for her present *rôle* she can not be too old—the older the better."

"What do you mean?" says Gillian, mystified. "What *rôle?*"

But Anne only runs away laughing, and telling her that she is dull, and that there are none so blind as those who will not see.

It is on the continuance of fine weather that the life of the

excursion hangs, and now the weather breaks. It has held so long, that probably, now that it has once broken, there will be a continuance of storms and rain. The quicksilver daily sinks; Ingleboro gathers his gray cloud-cloak sullenly round him; the roads are deep in mud, and the river rises. No child, counting the hours to a rare holiday, has ever consulted the barometer, watched the signs of the sky, or asked counsel of the weather-wise among the country people with a more anxious zeal, a more trepidating heart, than does Gillian Latimer.

The afternoon before the appointed day has arrived, and there is no improvement in the aspect of heaven or earth. Too restless to remain indoors, Gillian strays, in the driving rain, about the drenched and battered garden, looks disconsolately at the splashed and dispetaled geraniums, and listens to the sighing of the sad wind, from which all tone of summer has gone.

"It sounds well for your party of pleasure, dear," says Jane cheerfully at dinner that evening, as the great drops are heard beating on the pane outside. "I must say I am not at all sorry; it will teach Miss Sophia not to make such a fuss about her *fête*, as she calls it, another year."

But Jane's joy is premature. Contrary to all expectations, despite the angry and wintry-sounding night that has preceded it, the fateful morning rises fair and splendid. The wind's giant arm has abolished the clouds from the sky, or piled them on the horizon, and the sun is sucking up earth's many tears.

There is nothing to hinder Sophia's little gala from taking place. But oh, hard fate! There is every reason why one member of the intended party should take no share in it. Of what use is it to Gillian that the sun shines, the breeze blows softly, and the flowers dry their wet cheeks and smile again, if she herself lies hopelessly prostrated by a murderous nervous headache? It may be caused by the anxiety of mind which

she has been passing through, it may be due to atmospheric influences; but, whatever may be the cause, the fact remains the same, that, at the very hour when the little cavalcade is setting forth on its afternoon's pleasuring, Miss Latimer lies prone—all mental pain swallowed up and extinguished by physical.

It is one of those headaches against which the strongest will would be powerless to strive, which cries out for darkness and silence, and shuts out consciousness of all suffering save that inflicted by itself. It is only in a dull, woolly way that she recognizes the loss of her last chance, and numbly feels that, though to-day nothing matters, to-morrow, when she is well, her heart will break.

The long hours pass heavily by, and at length, worn out by agony, she falls into a sleep, out of which she wakes to find that the red-hot pincers are no longer tweaking her temples, nor the little devils boring with awl and gimlet into her brain.

Though still feeling bruised and shabby, she is tolerably herself again. She rises, and, drawing the curtains and unbarring the carefully closed shutters, looks out on the waning light.

With day's decline, the weather has again changed and worsened. Heaven's brows are gathered in their blackest frown, and the strong, swift rain is racing down again.

Now and again a grumble of thunder and a crooked fire-tongue vary the sound of the pelting storm and the sight of the sulky welkin. Gillian dresses hastily, and descends to the large sitting-hall, which looks out upon the terrace and the approach. Here she finds Jane, who has thought it due to herself not to lend her countenance to an excursion of which she was not the originator, standing with her nose flattened against the pane, looking out.

"They ought to be home by now, surely," cries Miss Latimer, in an anxious voice.

"Of course they ought," replies Jane, gruffly. "I suppose

they will be satisfied when they have drowned papa. I was mad to let him go."

"Surely they will not try the ford," said Gillian, agitatedly—"they could not be so insane! Why, the Lune has been rising for days."

"I put nothing past them," rejoins Jane, crossly; "one thing is certain, that, if they do attempt it, they will all be carried away."

Having arrived at this comforting conclusion, they both sink into silence. For a good half-hour they so stand, uneasily waiting and listening, until at length their ears, nervously prickled, are rewarded by the sound of wheels intermittently heard through the now moderating rain. In their eagerness they are standing on the wet and gusty steps at the hall-door as the Tarltons' pony-carriage bowls up, and the Squire, with an alertness which clashes with his niece's idea of his reverend age, springs out and helps Sophia to alight—Sophia with her ulster-hood drawn over her head, and rain-drops trickling down her cold nose—Sophia, wet, yet beaming.

"The rain was unlucky, of course, but they have had a delightful day—one she shall never forget. To be sure, they came by Kirkby Bridge! how else? The others? oh, the others are close behind."

Altogether it appears that never was anxiety more futilely expended.

"All the same, dear," says Jane, hanging with a somewhat florid display of filial piety about the Squire's neck, and throwing thence a defiant glance at Sophia, "you have given me a shocking fright, and I can assure you that I shall not let you do it again in a hurry."

Her father's only answer is to cry, "Very well, Jenny—very well!" in an awkward voice, and Sophia smiles subtly.

While they are yet uncloaking in the hall, the wagonette arrives with its freight: Emilia, Anne, and the two Tarlton

boys—a freight as wet, but hardly so radiant, as the first detachment.

Grumbling and chill, they gather round the bright hearth, and it is some time before any one save Gillian, whose lips refuse to frame a question about him, remembers that one of the party is still absent.

"What have you done with Burnet?" cries the Squire, suddenly looking round and counting heads.

"He said he did not mind the rain, and that he would bring home the dog-cart," replies Anne, shivering and creeping closer to the blaze; "we *did* mind it very much."

"Did any one remember to warn him against the ford?" asks the Squire, looking inquiringly round for an answer.

"Of course his own sense would tell him that it was impracticable on such a night," says Sophia, judiciously, "or the groom."

But it turns out that the groom is a stranger—a new and inexperienced helper lately imported into the neighborhood.

"I hope to Heaven he was not such a fool as to try!" says the Squire, gravely; "if he did, he has been swept away to a moral certainty."

They all assent, though not very emotionally—"To a moral certainty."

"However, no doubt it will be all right," says the Squire, soon lapsing into his habitual sanguine cheerfulness.

They all agree, "No doubt it will be all right"; and thus philosophically concluding, troop away to dress for that dinner which has always formed part of the day's programme.

In the case of a person in whom one is not very warmly interested, one always thinks it will be all right.

As soon as they are gone, and there is no one left to observe her moments, Gillian slips out again at the hall-door, and stands once more on the dripping steps, where she and Jane had but now awaited the return of the revelers.

Even from there she can plainly hear the angry river roaring

along; the river that in fair weather steals so sweetly lisping round its water-worn stones. The words so lightly spoken recur, freezing her blood with horror. What freight may even now its strong current be hurling and dashing along!

Half an hour passes. The rest of the party go to dinner, tranquilly observing that they wish he would turn up—that they are really very anxious about him, but that no doubt it will be all right.

Gillian, exempted by her late headache from the necessity of joining them, returns to her post on the steps. By and by her fears take such an exaggerated hold to her; her imagination presents to her pictures of so dreadful a vividness, that this inactive waiting and listening grow intolerable to her.

Without staying to think what construction will be put upon her absence if discovered, she hastily catches up a waterproof from a stand in the entrance-hall, thrusts her feet into a pair of all too roomy goloshes, and passes out on the terrace and thence to the front drive, down which she walks quickly. The storm is over, the clouds are breaking everywhere; now and then letting the full moon look whitely through, and again peevishly hiding her.

CHAPTER VII.

"A mighty pain to love it is,
And 'tis a pain that pain to miss;
But of all pain the greatest pain
It is to love and love in vain."

UNDERFOOT and all round it is wet—oh, drenchingly, drowningly wet! As long as she is in the drive, which is all on an incline, and from which the water runs quickly, it is not so bad; but when she reaches the high-road where the gutters

race like torrents, and the moon sees herself angrily and brokenly reflected in the muddy puddles, then is the time.

She stands and listens. There is no sound but the drip from the trees and the rush of the river. No wheel of belated farmer or slow wagoner is audible. Every one is safely, comfortably housed from the fierce weather. Perhaps the river has got upon her nerves, already shaken by her long day's pain; certainly she had no such deliberate intention when she set out, and yet she now begins to walk almost unconsciously toward the Lune; along the road first, then turning in at a gate, she labors through heavy grass-fields, where at each step the sticky soil pulls off her goloshes; and finally by a flooded lane, where she has to hug the hedge-bank the whole way, she at length reaches the ford, or rather the place where the ford is wont to be.

She has been urged on by the vague yet potent necessity of seeing for herself in what state it is. As she stands, deep-rooted in mud, on the bank, and sees the once peaceful, sweet stream swirling and maddening along, and the fierce moon looking at herself in its shifting mirror, she shudders and is yet reassured. No one in its present state could have made the attempt to stem its stormy waters. Had it run less high, the peril would have been less obvious, and consequently greater.

With her fears partially relieved, and half-ashamed of her own apprehensions, beginning to wonder how she shall steal unobserved back into the house, she retraces her steps through the lane that seems even wetter, and the fields heavier, than on her former transit.

As she opens the gate to return into the road, she is aware of a foot-passenger, stoutly splashing along the swimming road in the direction of Marlowe. In a moment, the moon shining full on his face, she has recognized him on whom she has been expending all these futile fears.

"It is you!" she cries, joyfully, forgetting for the moment

everything in the relief of knowing that he is safe, and stepping hastily to meet him.

At the sound of her voice, than which nothing less expected could break on his ear, he starts violently, and looks at her doubtingly, as if questioning to what world she may belong.

"Yes, it is I," he answers slow and bewildered; "but is this *you?*—that is much more astonishing!"

In an instant his tone has recalled her to herself—her dignified, reticent, every-day self—has made her hotly conscious of her dishevelment, her mire, her goloshes, the compromising unwisdom of her latest action.

"I—I—grew nervous," she says, stammering. "I was anxious about the—the party."

"Is it possible that they have not returned yet?" he asks, hastily. "They ought to have been home hours ago."

At his every word her humiliation grows deeper; it is evident that he is unable to grasp the extent of her folly.

"They—are—all—back—now," she says, reluctantly; "all except—" She stops.

"All except me?" in a voice of the deepest, most hesitating wonder.

"I was afraid," she says, wretchedly, and again stammering, "that—that—being a stranger in the country, you would not know—that you might try the ford."

"To-night?" elevating his eyebrows; "would any one but a maniac?"

She has not the spirit to attempt any answer—to set up any defense. She does not even lift her eyes from the puddle in which she is standing. After a pause—

"Do I understand you aright?" he says, with an odd vibration in his voice, which—heiress and beauty as she is—makes her proud heart, love-humbled, leap with the sudden up-flaming of that hope which of late has burned so dim. "Is it possible that it was anxiety about *me* which has brought you out on such a night?"

"I did not wish you to drown," she murmurs, hanging her head.

There is a pause, during which the gutters run and the ash-trees drip. Though she is not looking at him, the girl is aware that Burnet has made several unsuccessful attempts at speech; at length, in a quivering and uneven voice that contrasts with and contradicts the cold and cruel civility of his words, he says:

"I am exceedingly obliged to you—more than I can well express—but you were mistaken in thinking that there was any danger."

"So it seems," she answers, feeling very small.

"Before I had gone a quarter of a mile," he continued, "the mare cast a shoe. I had to walk her all the way to Kirby, and, leaving her there, came on on foot.

"It was not only I that was alarmed," she says, setting up an eager yet lame defense of that impulsive action of which she now so sincerely repents; "my uncle—they all—"

"Is it so indeed?" he cries in a concerned voice; "is it possible? Do you mean that they are *all* now looking for me?"

"Well, no," she answers, stammering and abashed—"not quite that; they—they had to go to dinner!"

For an instant a smile flashes across his face; a smile—or so it seems, unless misread in the deceptive light—much more tender than amused.

"You will catch cold," he says in a rather unsteady voice, stepping a pace nearer to her.

"I have a mackintosh," she says, "and goloshes," lifting, as she speaks, one from the puddle in which she is standing, in confirmation of her word; one which having been originally three times too large for her, and with its size now quadrupled by mire, shows colossal in the moonlight.

They both laugh, though neither is perhaps very mirthfully

minded, and at once set off walking briskly toward the house. They are nearing the lodge before Gillian again speaks.

"You are really off to-morrow?"

"Yes, really at last—with an unmistakable accent of relief.

"That does not sound as if you had enjoyed your holiday much," she says, laughing a little unnaturally.

"I have not enjoyed it," he answers, curtly.

There is such a flat depression in his tone, such an absence of hope or elasticity, that her own voice trembles as she rejoins:

"And yet you used to love the mountains: if you remember, it was the one subject we were always agreed upon."

"Did I love them?" he says, his keen eye wandering in eager melancholy over the nightly landscape, now made all weird and pearly by the vanquishing moon; "then I think I have changed my mind. I think I hate them now. Yes, fell and Lune and valley"—with gathering agitation—"I hate them all! They have lent themselves to unmanly dreams."

For a moment she is silent, thrilled to the heart by the new emotion of his altered tones. Then lifting her eyes, meek and sweetly moonwashed, to his, she says, softly:

"I think that there are some dreams that are better than any waking!"

For a while he regards her dumbly and irresolutely, then suddenly taking possession of her two delicate cold hands, he says to her low and most earnestly, as one whose words come straight and true from his very heart.

"I think it is better I should tell you—there are voices that whisper to a man that, if he has a grain of self-respect, he had far better die than listen to. Such voices are whispering to me now; if I gave heed to them, I should be almost as base as you once thought me. That is why I am glad I am going where they will be drowned, or at least muffled; where, at all events, I shall not have leisure to hear them dinning into my ears from morn to night and from night to morn as they do now.

If you have any real friendship for me," speaking very emphatically, and in a tone of almost pathetic appeal, "as, despite our bad beginning," with a painful smile, "I am almost sure that you have, you will be glad for me too."

So saying, and strongly wringing the hands he holds, he looses them, and, turning from her into a side-walk that leads through the shrubberies, disappears.

She remains standing alone in the moonlight, as one stunned. It is clear that he who had once told her that he would rather be flayed alive than wed her, is of the same mind still.

CHAPTER VIII.

Thus doubt ends. There are few of us that can specify with such exactness as can Gillian Latimer the precise moment and spot at which our life-hope finally goes out. On the wet drive at Marlowe, lucent pebbles underfoot, a ghosty moon overhead, and the distant, lowering hills standing round as witnesses, it yields up its last breath. While it was alive—though sorely sick, yet not past all hope of recovery—her sleep has been broken and dream-thwarted; to night she slumbers profound—lies tranquil as a three-years child tired out with play.

The morning rises murk and drear, with snatches of rain, and sobbing gusts of loudly-mournful wind. She does not know whether she is glad or sorry that it is so: whether a shining sun and basking flowers would have comforted her pain or increased it. And that pain itself is more dull than violent, so likelier, as she tells herself, to be a life-companion.

She goes down pale and calm. She feels as if a sort of solemnity enwrapped her—a large, composed indifference to the trivial yet galling rubs of her daily life; as one whose soul is ebbing away at a death-wound may think himself invulner-

able by pin-pricks or gnat-bites. Perhaps both are mistaken, and that the greater suffering by no means excludes the less.

Breakfast passes over silently. Jane is swelling and panting with hurt dignity at the recollection that neither was her influence strong enough to prevent the yesterday's *fete*, nor was her disapprobation, though markedly shown, able to lessen in any perceptible degree the hilarity of those who shared it.

As to the Squire, were Gillian not so preoccupied, she could hardly fail to remark that the Squire is strangly unlike himself. His face, not usually overcharged with expression, wears a look pregnant with unknown meaning. He eats less than usual, laughs where there is no joke, and answers at cross-purposes.

As his niece is in the act of leaving the room, she hears his voice—mysteriously altered, too—pursuing her.

"Are you busy, Gill?"

"I am never busy, dear," she answers, gently; "you know that I have been relieved of all my occupations."

"If you do not mind, if you can spare time"—nervously crumpling up his "Times," which he has been reading upside down—"I should be glad if you would let me speak to you for five minutes. I—I want to ask your opinion."

"*Mine*, dear?" with an irresistible little air of surprise and malice. "Are you sure that you do not mean Jane's?"

"No—no," very eagerly, lowering his voice, as one afraid of being overheard; not Jenny's—not Jenny's! yours, Gill."

Wondering, but acquiescent, she follows him into his study, and as, instead of once opening his business, he begins to fuss from the table to the window and back again, to turn over papers and push about stools, and, in short, show every symptom of nervous disquiet, she seats herself in his elbow-chair to await with composure the subsidence of his effervescence. At length—

"We have not been very comfortable of late, have w. .

Gill?" he says, eying her tentatively and obliquely for a moment, and then at once looking away again.

Not seeing the drift of this exordium, she can only assent with a puzzled air.

"Well, not particularly I think, dear."

"Jenny is a good child," he goes on, rather more glibly; "I am sure I have every reason to speak well of her, but I suppose I *have* given her her head rather too much of late, and so—for her own sake—"

"You are going to send her to school," cries Gillian, springing from her chair, her eyes dancing with an animation and pleasure of which she would have thought them quite incapable this funeral morning. "Oh, how wise you are, dear!" flinging her arms in irresistible *epanchement* round his short neck.

"It—it is not exactly that," says the Squire, writhing a little in her embrace, as if he knew he did not deserve it.

"Then what *is* it?" she cries, impatiently, loosing her clasp.

But this is just what he seems utterly powerless to explain.

Instead, he walks again to the window, and thence, with his back well turned to her, says, in a mumbling voice:

"It—it is not an easy thing for a man to be left with a lot of motherless girls on his hands."

"*Motherless!*"

She has found *le mot de l'énigme!* A flash of light darts in upon her.

"You are going to marry again," she says, in a breathless tone, the sudden scarlet hurrying up to her cheeks.

He utters no contradiction, nor does he turn his face toward her.

"I—I did it for the best," he says, in an apologetic tone. "I—I hope you do not mind?"

"Who is it?" she says, curtly, the red slowly dying into white again.

"You do not guess?" in a rather crestfallen and frightened tone. "She said she was sure that you had seen how it was all along, being so intimate with her—having known her all her life."

She has begun by looking thoroughly mystified and inquiring, but, as he comes to the last clause of his lame announcement, a light of comprehension leaps into her bright eyes.

"Is it Sophia Tarlton?" she asks, inquisitorially, marching sternly after him to the window, and compelling him to look at her.

At the sight of him, so red, so sheepish, so utterly out of countenance, her last doubt dies.

"I—I suppose that is about it," he says, with a wretched attempt at a laugh.

There is a pause, a pregnant, brooding pause.

Presently—"Sophia is your god-daughter," she says abruptly.

"Yes," he answers, humbly. "It is very unfortunate—it can not be helped."

"Isn't she rather young?" continues the girl, in the same cold, cut-and-dried tone.

"She is not far off thirty," he answers deprecatingly, "and everybody says that she looks a great deal more. She is not at all flighty or young in herself, and you know she never was reckoned good-looking."

Despite her unmerry mood, Gillian can not help breaking into unconquerable laughter.

"You are painting your lady-love in attractive colors," she says, dryly. Then, her conscience smiting her at the sight of the misery and confusion of his good-humored face, she goes on:

"I am taking your news very ill naturedly, dear, but you see it has come upon me like a thunder-clap. I think you have always been pretty happy, haven't you?" kindly caressing his hand, which she has taken; "but I hope you will be happier

still now. If you love each other you certainly will. The only people in this world who are to be really pitied"—with a little stroke of self-compassion which she knows will be neither noticed nor understood by him—"are those who have to do without love."

At the returning amity expressed in her voice, the Squire's brow clears. At all events the worst is over.

"And Jane," pursues Gillian, presently, a ray of pungent amusement lighting her serious face—"what about Jane?"

"Ay, that is it," he answers, blankly, involuntarily dropping his voice again; "who is to tell her? somebody must."

"Undoubtedly!" she answers, dryly.

"I—I thought," he says, nervously fiddling with the paper-weights and pens on the writing-table, and casting a glance of abject beseechment at his niece, "that perhaps you—you would like—you—you would not mind—you would."

"Thank you; no dear," she replies, laughing caustically, and shaking her head; "it is no business of mine. I would not for worlds deprive you of such a pleasure."

His face falls, but presently brightens again.

"I think I will leave it to *her*," he says.

From the time when he held her at the font, and gave her a mug and a rattle, he has always called his betrothed Sophia, as a matter of course; but now the name seems to present insuperable obstacles to his tongue.

"Do not you think, Gill, that it will come best from her?"

. . . . . .

In the afternoon, though the weather shows no improvement, Miss Tarlton drives over in her pony-carriage to receive the congratulations of her future family. As she wisely affects neither coyness nor sentiment, but appears in her usual *rôle*—perhaps a little intensified—of judicious, agreeable woman of the world—a *rôle* which ever since, at her entrance into

womanhood, it became clear to her that the path of beauty was closed to her, she has adopted—the salutations go off with less awkwardness than Gillian had feared.

"I suppose it has been *le secret de tout le monde* for some time," says Sophia, in high good-humor. "I am afraid we did not take much pains to conceal our intentions. No? Ah, true! Your suspicions lay in a different direction. Poor Dr. Burnet! at one time I was certainly rather interested in the study of his character. I am so still to a certain extent."

Gillian turns sharply away, with a sudden wince. After a moment, recovering herself—

"You will be good to him, won't you, Sophia?" she says, rather wistfully.

"I make no rash promises," answers Sophia, laughing. "He was born to be tyrannized over, he would be wretched if he were not; but I think I may engage that my yoke will not be so heavy as Jane's, and (rather slyly) "not much worse than yours."

At this moment the Squire himself enters—enters, but not unattended. About his broad shoulders is thrown the fostering arm of his tall daughter; a somewhat offensive air of protection and devotion in her whole bearing.

"How do you do, Sophia?" she says, extending her hand with an air of cold patronage. "You are very brave to come out on such a day; we did not at all expect morning visitors."

"Didn't you, Jane?" replies Sophia, composedly. "I came to talk business with your father; *à propos*, my child, would you mind joining Emilia in the schoolroom while we discuss it?"

For a moment Jane's breath is so entirely taken away by this proposition, that she is incapable of any answer. Then—

"Join Emilia!" she cries lou ily, and crimsoning. "I think you forget yourself, Sophia! Be turned out of my own drawing-room! Do you hear, papa? I appeal to you. Do you wish me to be turned out of my own drawing-room?"

But the Squire has meanly backed out of the room again, leaving his womankind to fight it out.

"Do not let us have a scene, Jane," says Sophia, with quiet authority. "When you learn what our future relations to each other are to be, I am sure you will see the propriety of complying; go, dear" (pointing decisively to the door), "let us hear no more about it."

For a moment Jane stood stunned; then, as the overwhelming nature of the blow that has fallen upon her breaks upon her mind, she turns and bursts, stormily weeping, from the room.

"She is a fine girl," says Sophia, following her noisy exit with a dispassionate eye, "but she needs discipline. A couple of years at a good school will make her a different being."

CHAPTER IX.

Thus Fate takes the matter out of Gillian's hand. She has hesitated, procrastinated, lingered; and now hesitation and proscrastination must end.

Under the firmer, if less tyrannical, sway of Sophia, there will be even less place for her than beneath Jane's violent rule. For the latter, being in its essence a tyranny, may any day be disrupted and break, as it has now broken; but Sophia's strong and sober queenship will last till the All-ender ends it. So Gillian must go.

To most it would seem no hard fate, thus trebly panoplied in youth, beauty, and wealth, to face a world which always meets with suave smiles and kisses those who come to it full-handed. Had Gillian a hump, her fortune would make her of importance; and were she penniless, her proud, dewy eyes

and her flower-textured face would open doors and hearts to her.

As the news of the Squire's intended marriage, and of his niece's consequent quitting of his establishment to form a home of her own, becomes noised abroad, several of her admirers are emboldened to come forward and generously offer to share her two hundred thousand pounds. Chaloner suggests that he and she shall burn like a pure and gem-like flame upon one altar.

She thanks them all for their good opinion, but replies that her thoughts are not turned toward marriage.

She has decided finally upon a year's travel—an Egyptian winter, an Italian spring, a Swiss summer. If none of these change the current of her thoughts, she is indeed incorrigible.

Indifferent, almost hostile as she has hitherto felt toward her own wealth, she can not but be in some measure thankful for it now. Were she poor, she would have to stay at home, brooding with one-idead monotony over her pain. Now she can take it in luxurious travel, to be dissipated, if it may, by strange sights and Nile airs softly blowing.

She has not long come to this decision, but is already almost as deeply immersed in guide-books, maps, couriers, and traveling companions, as is Sophia in the selection of a trousseau sensible and judicious as herself—a trousseau which will do credit to the Squire's choice, without making him appear ridiculous when seen beside it.

One morning Gillian is sitting at the general writing-table in the hall (from her own Jane has early ousted her), a pile of letters to be answered, relating chiefly to her future travels, before her, when the Squire enters hastily, to her surprise—for at breakfast he had given no hint of such an intention—equipped as for a journey. On his countenance are patent marks of discomposure and apprehension.

"I have come to say good-by, Gill," he says, approaching her. "I am off to London."

She looks up inquiringly.

"Are you dear? is not that rather a sudden thought?"

"The fact is," he answers, in an embarrassed voice, "I—I have had some bad news."

"Have you, indeed?" she says, solicitously, and rising. "Of what kind?"

Looking at him now more narrowly, she perceives the extreme gravity of his air and manner.

"It does not affect me personally," he answers evasively; "I wish it did. It is about—about—"

It is so evident that he is awkwardly trying to break something to her, as the phrase is, that her fears rise.

Before her judgment can interpose to point out that the Squire would see no reason why the severest ill that could befall Burnet should be broken to her, her alarms have fled irrational and lightning-quick to him.

"About me?" she cries, in great agitation—"oh! if so, pray let me hear at once! Is any one"—paling to the lips—"is any one ill?"

He shakes his head.

"No, not that I am aware of. The fact is"—producing a paper, which he has been holding in his hand, and pointing to a paragraph as he offers it to her—"I have just seen this; I do not want to frighten you, Gill, but I—I do not like the look of it."

Her eyes follow the direction indicated, and she reads:

"BY TELEGRAPH.

"At a meeting of Bank Managers, held in Edinburgh last night, it was intimated that the Drumcoe and Farbrigg Bank had resolved to stop payment."

It is the bank shares in which form part of the undesired legacy lately left her by her far-away cousin.

"Is that all?" she cries, drawing a breath of relief; "pray

do not take such a trifle as that to heart, dear! Lightly come, and lightly gone," shrugging philosophically.

But the nonchalance with which she receives the news of her loss has no effect in clearing his brow.

"I do not want to frighten you," he repeats very seriously, "but I am afraid it involves more than that. You see it was an unlimited concern."

"Was it?" she says, startled but not for the moment seeing the drift of his observation.

"And being so, the shareholders are liable, not only for the amount of their shares, but for every other penny they possess in the world."

"I do not understand," she answers, in a puzzled voice; her features not having even yet caught much reflection of the alarm of his. "Do you mean that the mere accidental owning a few pounds in this bank can involve the loss of my whole fortune? Why, I did not even invest them! they were left to me. I was not given any choice in the matter."

"That is the law, however," he says, still in that aghast tone.

"Do you mean," she says, changing color a little, though not very perceptibly, as the full meaning of his words dawns on her unprepared and wondering mind, "that they can call upon me for everything I have in the world—all my other investments—everything?"

"It is so," he answers, miserably. "Even trustees have been held liable; if it had happened six months ago, they would have come down on Burnet too for every penny he possessed."

"Then thank God it did not happen six months ago!" she answers, emphatically.

There is a pause.

Gillian has sat down again, and is blankly staring at the sentences she has just read without understanding a word of them.

"It is no use," she says, shaking her fair head; "I can not take it in. I suppose one can not at the first moment. I am all in a maze. How soon"– looking up at him with composure, and laying on his sleeve a hand that trembles scarcely more than it did when at his entrance she first placed it there—"how soon shall we know the worst? One would like to know as soon as possible how one stands."

"That is why I am going to London," he cries, eagerly catching at the idea of exertion and action. "I must see Saunders at once. Saunders will tell us. Saunders will know."

Ten minutes later he is setting off, fussily buttoning his ulster and fervently kissing her, and saying in a sobbing, smothered voice:

"Keep up, Gill—don't break down!"

She stands calmly watching him as he whirls away out of sight, with almost a smile on her face.

It surprises even herself, but she does not feel the slightest inclination to break down.

CHAPTER X.

"Die Engel, die nennen es Himmelsfreud',
Die Teufel, die nennen es Hollenleid,
Die Menschen, die nennen es—Liebe!"

THE Squire is away three days. Three days upon which Gillian afterward looks back as being in their essence different from any other three in her whole life. Throughout them the same composure folds her as had come to her aid in the first moment.

Her friends and house-mates think that she is stunned by the magnitude of the blow that has fallen upon her, but she

knows that it is not so; she knows that she tastes the thymy sweetness of the fell-breeze and the warmth of the recovered sunshine with as keen a palate as ever, that there has even come back to her spirits an elasticity that has long been absent from them.

Her fortune has never been connected in her mind but with ideas of mortification, anxiety, and pain. Before she had it, she lacked none of the good things it brought her; and, though reason speaks to her of the changed and infinitely worsened conditions of her future life, yet no reason is able to quell the spontaneous and to onlookers inexplicable light-heartedness which has sprung up in her.

When she laughs they think that she must be hysterical, and look round anxiously for hartshorn and burned feathers. All speak to her in soft, low keys, as though one so visited needed gentle handling; even wrathful, dethroned Jane lowers her masterful voice in addressing her.

And through it all she feels herself an impostor, that is obtaining under false pretenses all their kind looks and tender tones.

At the end of the three days the Squire returns, returns crestfallen, dejected, wretched beyond example or compare. For he is the bearer of ill tidings.

The news of the failure of the Drumcoe and Farbrigg Bank and of the large ruin it involves, is but too well authenticated. Among the numerous victims precipitated by its collapse in one moment from affluence or competence to direst poverty is Gillian Latimer.

It is with torrents of tears, straining her to his good, warm heart, that he tells her this.

She cries, too, for sympathy, but her heart is light. She has, indeed, much ado to restrain her laughter, when presently she finds her uncle, carried away by the emotion of the moment, actually proposing to abandon his Sophia, and reinstate *her* in her old place as mistress of his house and heart.

Nor can anything be kinder than the unsuspecting Sophia herself.

"Dear Gill," she says, caressing the girl's fair hand, "of course your home will always be with us. I am not afraid of being contradicted"—with a glance of easy confidence at her betrothed—"when I say so."

The Squire looks rather guilty, and, at the recollection of his late offer, a slight, short smile steals over Gillian's own grave lips—grave more because she knows it is expected of them, than that they could not very easily break redly into laughter.

When they have for the present done kissing and crying over her, she slips away from them to combat, as they think, her woe in the privacy of her own room; in reality, to breast the mountain-side.

A longing for solitude and high places is upon her, high places where she can sing and talk aloud to herself, and give some account to her own heart of this apparently perverse and senseless joyousness which has taken hold of her.

It is a long, stiff climb to Docker Moor, which she has proposed as the goal of her exertions. Up and up, behind the house, up the stony gray-walled mountain road, through the long, steep pastures, to where, standing at the top, on the rugged table-land of rock and moor, the mixed breath of sea and hill blows fresh and keen in her toiling face.

She has reached the summit, and, flushed and panting, has sunk down on a lichened bowlder to take her pleasant rest. Not a living soul is within sight or sound. Nature's soothing silence enwraps her; and while her lazy hands pluck two little wiry heather-sprigs, her eye, free and possessive, wanders, widely round, from where the salt tide washes into Morecambe Bay, to where the fair fells lift their shining shoulders and the sun twists through the meads. It is a day of autumn pride and pomp, crisp and brave, with brake-fern frost touched into bronze, and universal shining.

As so she sits, queening it alone on the hill-top, little

smiles, that none see flit across her face. She is glad—it is a good omen—that, on the day which has brought her apparent ruin, the sun should make such a fair show, and the breeze so freshly whisper.

Do they rejoice with her, all of them—sun and breeze and thymy fell—that the golden load has fallen from her shoulders, that the wall built up between her and him has fallen as Jericho's wall fell at the trump of the Syrian magi, and that there is now nothing to prevent him from stretching out his hand to her across its ruins?

The light-foot hours dance by, the great sun declines to his setting, and to receive him all the amorous west dresses herself in blinding carnations and wondrous pale sulphurs. The night, that comes quickly now in these shortening days, draws on. She must go.

With a reluctant sigh of good-by to her fair visions, she rises and prepares to retrace her steps downward. Just as she is in the act of setting off, her eye is caught by a distant solitary figure climbing the hillside as she herself had done two hours ago. At sight of him, she catches her breath, and, with hands locked and straining eyes, awaits his coming.

Past the dark fir-wood he fleetly mounts; across the uneven rock and the sparse hill-grass he steps. He is within sight now —within recognition.

All beflamed with sunset she sees him; she knows him! After all, she is not surprised. She had known that he would come; but that this day, this very day, would be the crowned king-day of her life, she had not known.

As he nears her, she makes an effort to go to meet him; but of our poor powers joy robs us no less than pain. She must needs give up the attempt, and sink down once more, all trembling, on her rocky throne.

He is close to her now—he is beside her—and she is looking up with love's pallid ecstasy into his transfigured face.

"Have you come to condole with me?" she says, putting

out her shaking hand to him, and with a tremulous low laugh.

For the moment he does not answer. Perhaps by her throne he recognizes that she is a queen. At all events, he has thrown himself courtier-wise on his knees beside her, and, with his head bent down to the very earth, is madly kissing the hem of her gown.

"What are you doing?" she cries, below her breath, panting and almost inarticulate.

Then, indeed, he lifts his radiant face—radiant even through manhood's rare and precious tears.

"I am asking," he cries, brokenly, "asking for a boon so great that I dare not put it into words—that I wonder how I dare to ask it at all!"

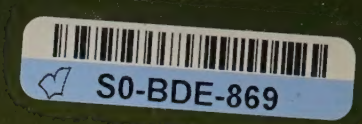
There is a moment's pause; then—

"You loved your pride more than me," she says with a little sob. "How do you know that I do not love mine better than I do you?"

For all answer he enfolds her slender body with the passionate vigor of his fond arms; and she, yielding to that loved and desired embrace, falls forward weeping on his neck.

"You said once that you had rather be fl——" she murmurs indistinctly; but the end of that ugly sentence is cut off by a kiss.

THE END.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